Sulfur 27

GION BY MINA LOY • **POETRY FROM EAST BERLIN** • THE PHILOSOPHY OF
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N ON RICHARD WILBUR • **NOTES ON RELIGION BY MINA LOY** • POETRY

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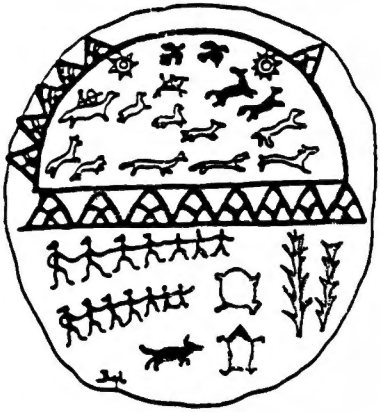

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SULFUR magazine has its main offices c/o English Department, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, MI 48197 (telephone: 313/483-9787). Subscriptions are $12 (2 issues) for individuals, $17 for institutions. Current issue #27 is Vol. X, #2. Foreign subscriptions, including Canada, add $3.00 for book rate mail or $8 for air mail. Make checks payable to SULFUR in *U.S. Currency.* Back issues (except for #1, #15 and #19) are available. CLAIMS FOR MISSING NUMBERS WILL BE HONORED ONLY WITHIN 3 MONTHS after publication. No unsolicited manuscripts will be returned unless accompanied by SASE. ISSN #: 0730-305X.

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DESIGN AND TYPOGRAPHY BY BARBARA MARTIN
TYPESETTING BY LAZERTYPE, SANTA ROSA, CA

FALL 1990

A LITERARY BI-ANNUAL OF THE WHOLE ART

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COVER : MIGUEL ANGEL RIOS / Morado Obscuro; 32" x 35", Wood and Clay on Canvas, 1989 [Courtesy of Vrej Baghoomian Gallery, NYC]

David Reed's paintings are reproduced here courtesy of Max Protetch Gallery, NYC.

The writing by George Oppen comes from The Archive for New Poetry, at the University of California at San Diego. We gratefully acknowledge permission to publish this material.

1990 issues of *Sulfur* are made possible in part by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Arts Foundation of Michigan [Detroit].

MILTON KESSLER

ZERO

The Ch-ing Emperor's troupe of buried horses
The visor-blinded horses of the jousts
The pompadoured bronze horses of the Rénaissance
The Elgin horses roped and dragged from Athens
The Generalissimo's mount in Freedom Square
The noble cheval burst by English archers
The cannon deaf cavalry of Bull Run
The Imam's Arabians writhing on the cross of Allah
The dive-bombed horse with tongue of broken glass
Seigfried's horror horse with Panzer lancer
Horses were never interested in war
War no longer interested in horses
The investment stallions seeding twitched mares
The ground horse catfood of the dispossessed
The cast horses in the Mafia stables
The shiver brained coursers wearing buttercups
The cossack horses higher than whole villages
The porcelain dancers of the Lippizaner
The Indian ponies trained to die like savages
The slipping horsefeet of Alexander Nevsky
The heart-horned horses of the picadores
The cigarette horses branded sex and death
The pinup stallions of gold college girls
The cowboy's true horse on the lonely range
The dawn is the head of a sacrificed horse

LITANY I AND II

LITANY (I)

". . .so many voices, there"

but not one loud enough to hear (close the door
quietly, sound travels) as more than motion:

a train passing (we'll wait here until there is
better reason to leave) or the bells' ringing

carried by rain across a city (the year's first
flooding in the flat lands) unhinged and always

preparing itself (they dressed in white for both
prayer and death) for the next siege (caves,

under the poppy fields)

while we, you and I, have been preparing ourselves
for speech (always a light on at the gate) since

first we fell silent. Not knowing what will heal
(trapped in byways, between endings) or what will

name (electrical current cut) us in the blackouts,
we look for traces in the dark of what has been

said (wear no leather when you are in mourning)
though only the chiming of the bells from the empty

church can cross the city.

He could not hear us, as children, when we came
(carry the candlesticks, wrap them in white linen)

to say good-bye before leaving the country, and he
(to heal: first name the disease) was yellow from

lung cancer and would be dead long before, and if,
we returned (echoing through the damp passageways

between caves: caverns, storage wells and dark
sanctuaries. small chambers with sloping stairs),

not tied to this or any other continent.

An illusion of belonging (we come from a long
line of women who hated themselves) and no other

longing (unhinged) but for order in the voices
that storm (the last train left weeks ago)—

we've been away longer than those markers (don't
forget the hour of candlelighting) show, languages

forgotten (in secret closets, in musty cellars)
though a memory of the source, somewhere between

heart and throat, remains.

The coffin was put on the next plane (remember her
long years of depression, hands shaking) as he had

wanted to be buried in holy dirt (at home) and when
the van pulled into the courtyard (an equidistance

between two continents), the only sound was our
old aunt (to heal: first name the disease) wailing,

running alongside the van as it slowed (among
blackcoated strangers) and stopped, she was wailing

(stone and black strokes)

and screaming at at her dead brother who had never
returned. She, with all the women (his body wrapped

in white, lighter than hollow bones) not allowed to
go to the cemetery, but the rabbi ripped her black

blouse across its worn collar (tear your clothes in
mourning, sit seven days) and she wouldn't stop

wailing. This isn't about travel: only in which
strange city (Thessaloniki, Palmyra) did we, you

and I, first fall silent?

Voices from the east, (the tracks are rusted and no
longer used) where meaning lies in the inflection

of the silence (seeds dried in the sun), in the
strange accents we speak (wait for the third star

before you light fire) and never fully recognize
(to heal: first name the disease) as our own

(sins committed with words)—only the motion of
sound (her dry tongue after the shock treatment)

am I sure of.

As to the crowded litanies (she sewed snaps on half
made skirts, dime a dozen) in the places of prayer

and in the markets, I can only record: crossroads,
train whistles, letters opened in public places,

the push (wear white, no leather) of so many voices
there, but not one clear enough to hear (across

the river in Petra), so much silence in that dark
space (beside the red rock) between desire and

dying and (what will name us)

LITANY (II)

"So many voices, there,
vie for the
    voice. . ."

and leave you
silent.

Neither sand nor prayer.

I am sorry:

as daughter
understanding less

what desire *disappointed*
will not loosen

its hold, or let
sleep. 5 a.m.:

you are walking around the lake.

Come back later and tell us
of the heron shrieking,
her wings weighted with ice.

What no one else saw.

How you stowed away
in the dark hull of a boat
smuggling arms into Palestine.

Now only the language will not travel,
across similar borders,
in black, in kefeyiah,

so you try to translate the memory.

Young man in uniform,
on the shores of a new Babel
among survivors who knew
no speech

would do

and fell silent.

Another walled city in ruins.

Not sand, not prayer.

At the British mental hospital
in Tiberias where stationed,

the mad from shellshock

screamed at night down
the green corridors, called
into the empty streets.

You walked by the water
after blackout
that jasmine

by the rare iron gate
swinging wild across
another night.

Always in between

countries, across oceans.
En route and arriving

at the airport
as the gate closes:

coming back to us

with ancient atlases and miniature
globes for the boys,
large dolls for the girls: we

wanted you not to leave
us behind,

were not trained for travel.

your three dark daughters
blue-eyed and green,
three solemn daughters crying.

So I cannot ask

between sand and prayer

what have you wanted,
and from whom.

In some foreign city, your heart
straying and you

collapsed by the baggage check,
black briefcase in hand.

Across an ocean and over
a phone line
the black water

storming over the deep laid wire.

Later you told us you said psalms
through the night
before surgery *heard*

your dead parents praying.

I have seen you

empty your pockets
into the sea, and believe

with crumbs and lint, your sins
would sink.

Now you ask:
in the Book of Life
or Book of Death?
so many voices,

here, come back,
your dead parents praying.

You listen, not of one
mind, to a new moon

three dark daughters all in green
in three separate cities crying

and your *new* heart *storming*

over the deep laid wire.

Note: "So many voices. . .voice. . ." Gustaf Sobin, "Lineage," in *Voyaging Portraits* (A New Directions Book, 1988).

MINA LOY

NOTES ON RELIGION

(Edited by Keith Tuma)

Introduction

The following "notes on religion," as I am calling them, were found in two files at the end of the Mina Loy papers at the Beinecke Library of Yale University. These files consist of a chaos of sometimes illegible hand-written notes for essays that Loy apparently intended but never wrote. I take seriously Ezra Pound's suggestion that the historian leave blank what he or she doesn't know, so I must say that I really don't know exactly what Loy intended. She did not intend to arrange a series of aphorisms, as my presentation of this material may suggest. One fragment not reproduced here leads me to guess that these notes were preparatory work for an essay that meant to "pacify the intellectual consternation, stunning as an explosion, before the unprecedented inhumanities of Axis warfare." This essay seems to have been meant to be a defense of faith at a moment when faith was most difficult. Another fragment from the same page of manuscript leads me to believe that Loy meant to include in the essay a description of a visionary experience she apparently had before World War I, an experience that may have initiated her life-long interest in Christian Science. I believe all of the notes reproduced here were intended for this essay except the remark about Freud. This remark and others not reproduced here seem to have been notes for an essay which would have responded to an essay on Jewish assimilation by one Milton Mayer. The relationship of Christian and Jew and the problems of Jewish assimilation were issues close to Loy, as any reader of her long, brilliant autobiographical poem "Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose" knows. If I am right about Loy's intentions, notes for both essays would have been taken in the early 1940s, when Loy was living as something of a recluse in the Bowery and writing some of her very best poems, such as "Property of Pigeons." These are not poems that have been much discussed—what little attention Loy has received has tended to focus on the "Love Songs" and other poems from the period of her closest affiliation with an international avant-garde—and they deserve to be better known. My hope is that these notes, interesting in their own right, will help readers think about those poems.

As I said above, the files from which these notes are culled are a chaos, not unlike Loy's life. It is a miracle that they survive at all. Any attempt to reproduce them, even a facsimile edition, would inevitably distort the original order of the notes, for no order among the sheets of paper is easily discernible. I have simply typed out what I could read and what seemed reasonably complete and coherent and interesting. There is more for future Loy scholars to do. I have wherever possible maintained Loy's somewhat idiosyncratic punctuation, and I have not tampered with sentences that seem to cry out for a word or two to complete them. I think the notes are lucid enough, fiercely epigrammatic, as is the best of her poetry.

I cannot resist one final remark. Interested readers of these notes might agitate for a new edition of Loy's collected poems. The handsome Jargon Press edition, *The Last Lunar Baedeker*, is now out of print.

I would like to thank the staff of the Beinecke Library for their hospitality and Mrs. Joella Bayer for her permission to publish these notes.

—Keith Tuma

The human mind has got to assemble for itself out of the infinite variation—a new fundamental—thought begin again with the simple relation of savage apprehension of the Macrocosmic presence—modified in some divinely decreed manner by its lengthy civilized apprenticeship.

It is because of the infinite obviousness of God that he escapes man's narrow attention.

Nobody seems to be able to accept that most simple—that Christ meant what he said. If you wish to sort out the actual relics of his teaching from the interpretations of his commentators—you can judge him by his style for the style is the man—in this case the style is the divinity.

Christ was the precursor of the ultimate. And if his necessity seems to have collapsed in an entire inutility—somewhere somehow however premature—however inadoptable to the intervening process of evolution—it was necessary to the salvation of the more out-reaching intellect that an indication of an ultimate point of arrival should be posited among the myriad points of departure in the habit of the human back-looking intellect.

Jesus knew that a certain element in human consciousness would inevitably ask where are we going to—towards what are we tending—and presented it with a synopsis of the future. Its utility lay in the fact that

although insanely inadoptable to the entire mass world consciousness—it would in some corner of some consciousness keep as the merest scintilla—the torch that will light the future.

It is there for the retrievement of desolation—for those who have arrived at the end of all things of the intellect—as an antidote to extinction.

The Christian appears to sink to a depth of servility that no normal self-respect could accept, the Jew to submit to a ritualism that is hardly less onerous than a deific vengeance that it is designed to avert.

The less sex appeal they have the more sure they are that God could not have created the flesh. The more repulsive they are the more sure they are that God could not have created the flesh.

The only way to enjoy your hell is to bring it into heaven with you—and I have come to show you how. Thus only can we interpret the promised redemption.

Jesus saw through us far better than Freud—in seeing that our real dilemma was our desperate determination to establish our identity apart from the general mass. While Freud believes man to be moved by instinct—Jesus saw him to be actuated by humbug.

When the gentile world falls over its self it is usual for the Jews to come to the rescue. When it required a savior they nailed up a Christ. When it required a second savior to counteract the effects of the first, Freud was at its service.

Re Moral Order—No such thing. Truly moral phenomena in human life occur erratically—without connection with any order or system at all.

Christian Morality—Fictitious = I increase your irresponsibility by imposing my responsibility.

If man has an immortal soul murder does not matter—it becomes important if there is no God.

Marriage is the arduous maxim of 'unity' imposed by the ironical levity of the moralist upon rudimentary beings.

Good form = setting the ideal value on the lie. Morality is a conspiracy to keep truth off the open market.

No man whose sex life was satisfactory ever became a moral censor.

Tagore—false mystic—attaches mystic value to metaphor per se. Makes the mistake also that mysticism is in its origin metaphorical. Intuition comes from an actual experience of modality among transcendental phenomena. The sign of the true mystic will ever be his declaration of the 'impossible.'

Christ's magical sayings—like those Chinese boxes containing more & more concentrated boxes within box—the outer one is the exoteric creed, the inner one increasingly esoteric. From peasant virtue to analysis of the mechanism of genius—the enlightenment of the saint—to that sublime instruction of the future man who would be as a God.

If the Eros impulse originated within Man himself he would know how to process its consummation—legs shows, marriage clinics, medical books on sex—never coming to the solution eluding him.

Orgasm = the microcosmic projection of the Paroxysm of creation.

Scintillating sterility—bar life after war. Suffering out of fashion supplanted by nervous irritation.

Eve did not bite to the core of the apple.

Now we know the sphinx is looking at nothing in particular. There was *one* who told her her secret & the sphinx said "how disgustin'."

ELIOT WEINBERGER

PAZ IN ASIA

1. A Continent of Poets

Paul Claudel went to China with the Foreign Service, and the century begins with his *Connaissance de l'Est* [Knowledge of the East, 1900]: "I understand the harmony of the world; when will I grasp its melody?"

Victor Segalen went to China as a medical officer and wrote a history of the stone statues. He printed his *Stèles* (1912), Chinese fashion, on the press of the Lazarite Fathers in Beidang: poems, semi-disguised as translations, that sought to "transfer the Chinese Empire to the Empire of the Self"; poems that would be as timeless, impassive, monumental, ceremonial as the slowly eroding characters carved on the funerary tablets; poems that "do not express: that signify, that are."

Arthur Waley never went to Asia, never learned to speak a word of Chinese or Japanese, and spent his life listening to that silence and recreating what he heard.

Ezra Pound never went to Asia: he constructed his own continent of texts, inventing the languages from which, and to which, they were translated. As a student he found the word "vortex" in the pamphlets on Hinduism he gave his fiancee, Hilda Doolittle; he practiced yogic breathing all his life; he believed in an idiosyncratic version of ***kundalini*** he had picked up in Remy de Gourmont. From the manuscripts he inherited from the Orientalist Ernest Fenollosa, he translated Noh plays, having little idea of their form, but finding in them the model for "a long poem in free verse, a long Imagiste poem." A model that would become the *Cantos* and, among so many things, encompass the dynastic history of China, as written by the French. He believed, with Fenollosa, that Chinese was the "ideal language of the world," a language whose writing was a direct representation of the thing expressed; that the "ideogram," like a poem, brought language back to its archaic concreteness. Translating the Chinese poems translated for Fenollosa by a Japanese informant, he repeated many of their mistakes; others he intuitively corrected. He found his ideal social order in Confucius, found a Confucian rectitude in Jefferson and Mussolini, hated "Taozers" and "Budhs." In the madhouse he wrote a

strange and magnificent ideogrammic translation of the *Book of Odes,* incorporating his own pseudo-etymologies in the text. In his last years, unable to marry a young disciple, he was absorbed in the love-suicide poems and the religious rituals of the Na-khi people on the Tibetan border: "without ²Mùan ¹bpö/ no reality."

W.B. Yeats never went to Asia, but he shared a cottage with Pound as the Fenollosa papers were being rewritten, and invented his own form of Irish Noh, based on Celtic myth and the dances he'd seen of Michio Ito, though Ito was attempting to jettison Japanese tradition. He believed in the Aryan myth, a net of cultural correspondences stretching from Dublin to Benares, and placed the Hindu swastika on the title-pages of his books. In his last years he planned to go to India with Sri Purohit Swami, but his health was poor. They went to Mallorca instead, and translated ten of the Upanishads.

Hu Shih went to Chicago in 1913, read the issue of *Poetry* with Pound's "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste" and returned to China to publish a nearly identical "Tentative Proposals for the Improvement of Literature"—finding in the West what Pound thought he had found in the East—a manifesto that set off the literary revolution of the May Fourth Movement of 1919.

Blaise Cendrars claimed he went to China, where the Chinese had changed his pseudonym from Braise Cendrart (ember-ash-art). His masterpiece, "Prose of the Transsiberian" (1913), recounts a trip across Russia and Mongolia to Harbin, Manchuria; it is doubtful he ever went. His 1914 poem "Bombay Express" is equally imaginary, and memorable for two immortal lines: "This year or next/ art criticism is as stupid as esperanto."

Rainer Maria Rilke never went to Asia, but he took a carving of the Buddha—as he took nearly everything—as a metaphor for the artist, enclosing the universe within, long after the stars are dead.

Raymond Roussel went to China and India in 1920, but rarely opened the shutters of his steamer cabins or his hotel rooms.

Max Jacob never went to Asia, but he declared, oh scandal, that three lines of any haiku were infinitely superior to the three hundred pages of Péguy's *Eve.*

T.S. Eliot never went to Asia, but he studied Sanskrit and Pali at Harvard, considered converting to Buddhism, and embedded bits of the Upanishads and the sermons of the Buddha in *The Waste Land* and the Bhagavad-Gita in *The Four Quartets*. "And I came to the conclusion. . .that my only hope of really penetrating to the heart of that mystery would

lie in forgetting how to think and feel as an American or a European: which, for practical as well as sentimental reasons, I did not wish to do."

Takamura Kōtarō saw a photograph of Rodin's "Poetry" and knew he had to get out. In 1906 he left Tokyo for New York, London and Paris, discovered Baudelaire, Rimbaud and the Symbolists, and returned three years later, bringing the vernacular and *vers libre* to Japanese poetry.

Saint-John Perse went to China in the 1920s as a diplomat, predicted a peasant revolution, and wrote, in prose poetry, the history of the conquest of an imaginary Central Asian kingdom, *Anabasis* (1924), which Eliot translated, and which, in the late twenties and thirties, launched a thousand young poets.

Pablo Neruda spent five years in the foreign service in Burma, Ceylon, India and Singapore, miserable, speaking little English, and writing the poems of his best book, *Residence on Earth* (1931 & 1935): poems that are notable for containing nearly nothing Asian in them.

William Carlos Williams never went to Asia, but before his death he translated nearly forty Chinese poems, working with David Rafael Wang, at the time the only Chinese White Supremacist in America, and later the only Chinese Black Panther.

Louis Zukofsky never went to Asia, but he found his initials—and what other poet so loved his own initials?—in the calligraphic signature of the Zen monk Ryōkan. The fourth section of his life-work *"A"* includes his translation of a "Japanese" poem by the Yiddish poet Samuel Bloomgarden ("Yehoash"): "Shimaunu-San, Samurai,/ When will you come home?"

Bertolt Brecht and Antonin Artaud never went to Asia, and never met, but at the same moment they discovered Eastern theater: a performance of Kabuki in Berlin, a Balinese troupe in Paris. For both it was the revelation of a ritualistic theater that was purely physical, that transcended language and eliminated stage artifice; from it they derived their dissimilar theories of alienation effect and cruelty. Brecht rewrote Arthur Waley's rewriting of Zenchiku's Noh play *Taniko* as *He Who Says Yes* (1929), and then rewrote it again as *He Who Says No* (1930). He took a bad translation of Li Hsing Tao's 13th century play *The Chalk Circle* and set it in the Caucasus; his *Man is Man* (1925) comes from Kipling's Raj; three of his other plays—notably *The Good Woman of Setzuan* (1940)—are set in China. Late in his life he translated some of Waley's translations of Po Chu-i, and among the papers left after his death was a scene from an unfinished play, *The Life of Confucius*, to be performed entirely by children.

Artaud never met the Dalai Lama, but he wrote him letters: "We are your faithful servants, O Grand Lama, give us, grace us with your illuminations in a language our contaminated minds can understand . . ."

[Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder met the Dalai Lama, though a different incarnation, who asked them about hallucinogenic mushrooms.]

W.H. Auden went to China with Christopher Isherwood during the Japanese War, wrote some of his worst poems, and read Trollope in a bunker as the bombs exploded around him.

William Empson lived in China for years, and wrote four pages of prose to explain the 28 lines of his poem called "China," in which, for example, the phrase "Cheese crumbles" meant that in the 1930s "the prolonged disorder of China made everything feel crumbling like cheese."

Basil Bunting never went to Asia, but he rewrote Kamono Chomei's prose memoir of the disasters in Kyoto in the 1180s, and for years the only Bunting scholars were in Japan.

Henri Michaux went everywhere in Asia, a parody of the outsider, a self-styled "barbarian" devoted to the sweetness of the particular and countless sour generalizations. The century's most radical translator of Chinese poetry, he took the written page, "which, covered with characters turns into something crammed and seething, full of lives and objects, of everything to be found in the world. . .clustered that they might end in ideas or unravel in poetry" and freed the signs of their signification, inventing a calligraphy for a language (languages) "far from words, far from other people's words."

Vicente Huidobro never went to Asia, but sitting in Paris in the 1920s he wondered: "When I move my left foot/ What is the great Chinese mandarin doing with his foot?"

Hugh MacDiarmid went to China in 1956, met Mao, and gave a public reading under enormous portraits of Blake and Whitman. He wrote the history of Western translations of Sanskrit as a six-page poem.

Charles Olson never went to Asia, but he mysteriously inserted the words of Mao, in French—as Pound had received his Chinese history from the French—into "The Kingfishers," and placed various Hindu gods in the niches of his *Maximus*.

The Spanish poets never went to Asia, for they found their Orient nearer, across the Straits of Gibraltar, and in their blood. But Juan Ramón Jiménez, Antonio Machado and Federico Garcia Lorca, in the haiku craze of the teens and twenties,

wrote short lyrics that were a conjunction of Japanese poetry and local folk songs, and Jiménez translated Tagore, a book that would be imitated—some would say plagiarized—by the young Neruda.

Kenneth Rexroth went to Japan often, re-imagined Chinese and Japanese poetry as it might have been written in the California Sierras, and in the last years of his life wrote the erotic poems of a young Japanese woman, Marichiko, whom he had invented.

Charles Reznikoff never went anywhere, but thought his poetics were most perfectly articulated by the Sung Dynasty poet Wei T'ai: "Poetry presents the thing in order to convey the feeling. It should be precise about the thing and reticent about the feeling."

André Breton never went to Asia, but he read Bashō and Suzuki, compared automatic writing to meditation, found Zen inferior to Surrealism, and thought the word Orient corresponded to the "anguish of these times, to its secret hope." On the Surrealist "Map of the World", Tibet occupied the largest space.

George Oppen never went to Asia, but in his only translation he collaborated on versions from the Bengali of poems in praise of the Goddess: "Words, there are words!/ But with your eyes/ We see. . ."

And the Chinese translations of the British Museum's Assistant Keeper of Oriental Antiquities, Soame Jenyns, descendent of Soame Jenyns, the 18th century optimist ridiculed by Johnson, were rewritten by the young Paul Blackburn, hitchhiking to St. Elizabeths to visit Pound.

René Daumel went to India in the 1920s, became the secretary to the Uday Shankar classical dance troupe, learned Sanskrit, and was the only poet of the century to directly translate the sacred texts and write on Indian poetics: "Crippled in the chaos of the Occident, without a connecting thread, I can only wish to play the necrologist-poet to an inimical culture. The Orient is still alive... But the Occidental free-arbitrary-dualist-individualist, the sad capitalist-colonialist-imperialist, fettered with the etiquette of his order—he is finished."

As Robert Duncan's mother put the boy to bed reading Bashō.

For poets, the project of the twentieth century has been the discovery of all that poetry is not (but could be) and the recovery of all that poetry (it is imagined) was. Pound predicted that the century's poets would find its "new Greece" in the East: there lay the greatest wealth of untranslated literature, and an ancient world that was almost new. To write the poem that had never been, a place to begin was the people who were not us.

> Nous ne pouvons pas aller au Japon
> Viens au Mexique!
>
> Blaise (Braise) Cendrars

Did these ancestors really meet, or did they merely sing to each other, like whales, across the Pacific Basin? There were no Mayan Boddhisattvas; no one in Anyang had his heart cut out to feed the sun. And yet what they made looks and does not look the same:

felines holding tiny figures in their paws; the chinless feathered monster headdresses; bracelets of open jaws; the diamond-patterned skirts; the loincloth aprons hanging from a monster mask; the anthropomorphic beings emerging from the mouths of long-snouted double-headed creatures; the serpent arches, framing a seated figure, with a mask at the apex; cross-legged deities; gods with three faces; the double-headed serpent held across the chest, and the serpent's Ho Chi Minh beard; gods with vertical stacked heads; the knee-length beads; the umbrella staffs; the high looping hair-dos; the figures standing on the backs of slaves or demons; the two profile heads that form a frontal face; the masks on the facades of the buildings; the maize god in the Boon-Bestowing mudra; the seated figures flanked by fat dwarves and topped with winged creatures; and—

could that really be an elephant carved on a stela in Copan?

Felipe de las Casas, son of a wealthy merchant, sails from Acapulco to Manila in 1590 to seek his fortune and taste the legendary vices. He next appears, four years later, at the doors of a Franciscan monastery, begging to be admitted to the order. His piety is great. In 1596 he is sent back to Mexico to preach. His ship, the *San Felipe*, is lost and more lost in a series of storms. It washes up on the coast of Japan. The Shogun, having reluctantly permitted Christian missionaries in Nagasaki, now believes they are the cause of a recent earthquake. Felipe and twenty-six other priests are crucified by samurai. At that moment, back in Mexico, the dried branches of a fig tree in the family's patio are suddenly covered with leaves. From the wreck of the *San Felipe*: San Felipe, the first Mexican saint.

By 1600 there is more trade across the Pacific than the Atlantic:

Mexican silver and gold, copper, chocolate and cochineal, for

Asian silk, camel hair, mineral and vegetable inks, precious stones, jade, rattan, marble,

paper, aromatic oils, cork, teak, feathers, camphor, amber, jet, alabaster, palm leaves for roofing, shells, furniture, porcelain, mother of pearl, and those pearls formed in the bellies of porcupines: the magical, medicinal bezoar stones.

In the 17th century some 600 Asian immigrants arrive each year in Mexico. One of them is a 12-year-old Moghul princess of Delhi, who was kidnapped by pirates off the Malabar Coast. Sold in the Manila slave market, she is shipped to Acapulco and sold again to a pious couple from Puebla. Under the religious training of her owners, she soon becomes famous as an ascetic and mystic. She is known as Catarina de San Juan, *la china poblana* [the Chinese woman of Puebla]; many miracles are attributed to her. An excellent seamstress, she embroiders her blouses and skirts with bright-colored flowers and birds. The fashion spreads throughout the country to become the "typical" Mexican dress. Its third component, the shawl, is imported from Gujarat in western India.

At the same moment, *mole*, the national dish, is invented by the nuns at the Puebla convent with which Catarina is associated. An array of chiles and spices are roasted and ground separately, and then combined with chocolate into a thick dark sauce. Though the ingredients are local, the process is unlike anything in Mexican cooking: it is, however, how Indian food is made.

In 1635 the Spanish barbers petition the Mexico City council to ask the Viceroy to drive the Oriental barbers out of the Plaza Mayor and other fashionable districts. The council refuses; they too want decent haircuts. By 1703 there is a full-scale Asian market at the southwest corner of the Plaza Mayor, selling silks, brocade, fans, lace, marble boxes, watches, microscopes, porcelain and painted screens. It will last until 1843.

In the 18th century, the currency of choice throughout China and Japan is the Mexican silver peso.

In 1888 Mexico and Japan open diplomatic relations. In 1896, the Mexican poet José Juan Tablada writes in a Japanese reverie: "Gilded mirage, opium dream,/ fountain of all my ideals!/ . . . / I am the slave of your Mikado!/ I am the bonze of your pagodas!"[1] In 1897 the Society for the Japanese Colonization of Mexico sends its first settlers to Chiapas to build coffee plantations and a new town called Enomoto Takeaki.

As the century begins, Tablada has finally arrived in Tokyo, though the experience barely tempers his *japonaiserie:* "The night, the lake, and the moon/ from her high balcony/ the Princess Satsuna gazes/ heady with opium and love."[2] He does, however, translate some tankas and utas which, though still full of Spanish Modernist (our Symbolist) rhetoric, are among the earliest in the language. And he ends the second section of his poem "Musa Japonica"—inexplicably titled in Latin and dedicated to the "beloved one"—with a tercet composed entirely of dots, which is either avant-garde or coy.

He returns to Mexico with an enormous collection of *ukiyo-e* prints and antiques, and builds a Japanese wing to his house in Coyoacán, complete with rock garden. In 1914 he publishes a book on Hiroshige, the first in Spanish. Later that year the house is plundered by Zapatistas overthrowing the dictatorship of Victoriano Huerta, whom Tablada had supported; the poet goes into exile in New York ("You women who go by on Fifth Avenue,/ so near to my eyes, so far from my life.")[3] In 1918 his first book of poetry in nearly ten years includes only one poem connected to Japan, a heroic ballad on the print maker Hokusai, most notable for its ingenious Spanish rhymes with Japanese words. The next year Tablada becomes Tablada with *One Day. . .*[Un día. . .], subtitled "Synthetic Poems", a small book of 38 haiku, written in Colombia and dedicated to the poets Shiyō and Bashō.

Though *One Day. . .* is, with Huidobro's 1917 and 1918 publications, *The Mirror of Water* [El espejo de agua], *Equatorial* [Ecuatorial] and *Arctic Poems* [Poemas árcticos], one of the first books of the Spanish Vanguard (our Modernism), the way to these haiku was perhaps pointed by Pound's 1912 "In a Station of the Metro," or Alfonso Reyes' 1913 "Euclides' haiku" ("Parallel lines/ are convergents/ that meet only in infinity.")[4] or the short poems Juan Ramón Jiménez was publishing in 1917 ("Book, the misfortune/ of being everywhere/ alone!")[5] Whatever the case, Tablada—unlike the Mexican Efrén Rebolledo who, though he lived for eight years in Japan and China, merely incorporated exotic images into the Symbolist fantasies of his *Japanese Rhymes* [Rimas japoneses, 1907 and 1915]—succeeded in eliminating all of the Oriental trappings, adapting the Japanese form to close observations of local flora and fauna. Tablada's remain among the most memorable haiku in any language: "Tierno saúz/ casi oro, casi ámbar,/ casi luz. . ." [which, losing the rhyme on which the poem turns, translates as: "Tender willow/ almost golden, almost amber/ almost light. . ."]

In 1920 he publishes his book of "ideographic" poems, *Li-Po and Other Poems* [Li-Po y otros poemas]. The title poem continues Tablada's witty use of East-West rhymes ("mejor

viajar/ en palanquín/ y hacer/ un poema/ sin fin/ en la torre/ de Kaolín/ de Nankín") ["better to travel/ in a palanquin/ and make/ a poem/ without end/ in the tower/ of Kaolin/ in Nankin"] and a page of it is written in the shape of the Chinese character for "longevity," a Taoist charm that had long since degenerated into a commercial good-luck emblem, like the Irish four-leafed clover. *Li-Po* is a book that contains, among others: the thinnest sonnet in Spanish;[6] a poem that must be held to a mirror to be read; a poem consisting almost entirely of nocturnal sounds; and the small simultaneist classic "Alternating nocturne":

New York night gold
Cold walls of Moorish lime
Rector's foxtrot champagne
Mute houses and heavy gates
And looking back
On the silent roofs
The soul petrified
The white cats of the moon
Like Lot's wife

And nevertheless
it is always
the same
in New York
or Bogota

MOON. . .![7]

It is unlikely that Tablada had seen the four calligrammic "Summer Japonaiseries" [Japonerías de estío] Huidobro had privately published in Santiago de Chile in 1913, but surely he was aware, despite his later denials, of Apollinaire's *Calligrammes*. "Lettre-Océan" [Sea-Mail] appeared in *Les Soirées de Paris* in June 1914: given its Mexican subject-matter, not to mention its Francophone variations on Mexican slang (*çingada*, indeed!), it was unlikely to have been missed by a Francophile like Tablada. The August issue of the magazine contained Apollinaire's "new-style" *calligrammes* in representational shapes (as most of Tablada's would be) and an article by the critic G. Arbouin on "Lettre-Océan" that was much discussed at the time. In his essay Arbouin declares that "it is necessary that our intelligence become accustomed to understanding synthetico-ideographically instead of analytico-discursively." Both of these key words, "synthetic" and "ideographic," would appear in the subtitles of *One Day. . .* and *Li-Po*. (Six months later,

another Francophile, Ezra Pound, would use the word for the first time in an essay on "Imagisme and England": "We have sought the force of Chinese ideographs *without knowing it.")*

In 1922 Tablada publishes *The Jug of Flowers* [El jarro de flores] a book of 68 haiku, including his wittiest efforts ("The little monkey's looking at me. . ./ He wants to tell me something/ but forgot what it was!")[8] and an introduction where Tablada gives himself credit for introducing haiku into Spanish. He even hints that it is his influence which has led to the special 1920 issue of *Nouvelle Revue Française* on haiku—though that publication was merely the climax of some years of haiku-mania: a fad that received its official imprimatur with the appointment of Paul Claudel as Ambassador to Japan in 1921.

Regardless of Tablada's international effect, his importance to Mexico is unquestionable: José Gorostiza's 1925 *Songs to Sing in the Boats* [Canciones para cantar en las barcas] contains poems about Li Po and the Lady Yang Kuei-fei, and tiny lyrics such as "The Lighthouse," which reads in its entirety: "Light-haired shepherd of fishing boats."[9] The same year Jaime Torres Bodet publishes a book of haiku called *Folding Screen* [Biombo—the Spanish word coming from the Japanese *byobu*, wind-break]. In 1926 Alfonso Reyes is writing "Afternoon": "Thin skin of the clouds/ where a sliver of moon/ stuck, is walking";[10] and Xavier Villaurrutia's "Insomniac Suite" [Suite del insomnio] that same year is a series of haiku.

And more haiku—it becomes a Mexican pastime—by Rafael Lozano, Manuel Ponce, Efrain Huerta, Homero Aridjis, Francisco Monterde, José Emilio Pacheco, and so many others.

Among them, the club Kuka-no-tsudoi, composed of Japanese businessmen and diplomats, which has been meeting monthly in Mexico City since 1955. After a dinner that combines *sashimi* and *carnitas*, these amateurs declaim their own haiku, such as:
Mariach/ kanade chikazuku/ yuuransen

that is: "Mariachis/ play, coming nearer:/ a pleasure-boat."

In Chinese and Japanese, the characters for "Mexico" mean:
COUNTRY OF INK

3. The figure in the landscape

As an adolescent, Octavio Paz discovers French modernism in *Anabasis*. A 1945 memorial essay on Tablada, emphasizing both the haiku and Mexican motifs, hopes to rescue the poet from oblivion—though the

poems will remain out of print for nearly thirty years. In 1952, his first visit to Japan; the poem "Is there no way out?" [¿No hay salida?] is written there. In 1955 the Mexican haiku of *Loose Stones* [Piedras sueltas] and the first Western translation of Bashō's poetry and prose travel journal, *Sendas de Oku* [in Cid Corman's translation, *Back Roads to Far Towns*] written with Eikichi Hayashiya. Erotic haiku in *Salamander* [Salamandra, 1962]. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, translations of Chinese and Japanese poets. *East Slope* [Ladera este, 1969], arguably his best book of poetry, takes its title from the Sung dynasty poet Su Shih, who wrote under the name Su Tung-p'o (East Slope). The pages on Taoism and Chinese eroticism in *Conjunctions and Disjunctions* [Conjunciones y disyunciones, 1969]. That same year, Paz collaborates with Charles Tomlinson, Eduardo Sanguineti and Jacques Roubaud on the quadrilingual *Renga*. In 1970, a major essay, "The Tradition of the Haiku" in the second edition of the Bashō book (reprinted in English in *Convergences)*. In the 1970s and 1980s, short essays on Tu Fu, Wang Wei, Han Yu and other Chinese poets. In 1976, the Japanese translation of *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, the first of many Paz books to be translated into that language. In 1979, *Hijos del aire/ Airborn*, a variation on renga written with Tomlinson. In 1984, a visit to Japan and pilgrimage to Bashō's hut. In 1989, Duo Duo, the young Chinese poet most avidly read by the students demonstrating in Tiananmen Square, remarks that his favorite poet is Octavio Paz.

> *The god that emerges from an orchid of clay*
> Born smiling
> From ceramic petals:
> A human flower.[11]

Like the invention of *mole* in a convent in Puebla: the adaptation of Eastern techniques, employing indigenous Mexican materials, in an essentially Western context. The poem, from *Loose Stones*, is of course written in Spanish, and not Nahuatl or Japanese; its form is a loose haiku; its subject the tiny Jaina god—a god, by the way, identical to the *apsaras* emerging from lotuses in the exactly contemporaneous T'ang art. A tropicalization of the haiku not invented by Paz—in the 1930s the Guatemalan Flavio Herrera was writing haiku like: "Happy/ to be Indian, it smiles:/ an ear of corn."[12]—but perfected by him.

What Paz, as so many others, found in the haiku was verbal concision, a precision based on close observation of the world, particularly the natural world, and the sense that a poem remains permanently at the verge of completion, never arriving, as Western art once attempted, at a finished totality. The reader always supplies the rest of a haiku, and it changes with

each reading. The haiku is a tiny graph of relations within the natural world—a world that includes its human observers—but these relations, according to Buddhism, are as illusory as the interacting beings. For both poet and reader it is a sudden act of the discovery and affirmation of a comradeship in illusion.

1955 as a turning-point in a work that keeps turning: In 1952, his one poem written in Japan, "Is there no way out?" begins, in Denise Levertov's translation, "Dozing I hear an incessant river running between dimly discerned, looming forms, drowsy and frowning."[13] The language, as in the other poems of this period, is lush, vague, rhetorical, Surrealist, unchained, interior. (Japan, of course, is notable for its absence of any major river.) After 1955 and his actual working with haiku—*Loose Stones* and the Bashō translation—Paz is able to bring the period to a close by joining the luxuriant rhetoric to a precise imagery that is far more concrete than anything previous in his or any one else's Surrealism: the incantatory *Sun Stone* [Piedra de sol, 1957]:

> a crystal willow, a poplar of water,
> a tall fountain the wind arches over. . .[14]

And from there, the almost inevitable move is toward an adaptation of Pound's "ideogrammic method": the stepped lines, the free-floating images forming configurations of meaning, the simultaneity of *Days and Occasions* [Días hábiles, 1961]:

> Night in the bones
> skeleton night
> the headlights touch your secret plazas
> the sanctuary of the body
> the ark of the spirit
> the lips of the wound
> the wooded cleft of the oracles[15]

Four poets in four languages meet for five days to write a series of collective poems. *Renga* (1969), the experiment, is an ideogram composed of many of Paz's essential elements:

The belief, from Lautréamont, that in the future poetry will be composed by the multitude, not the individual. The disappearance of the author, as it comes out of the Surrealist practices of automatic writing and the painters' "exquisite corpse," and, more recently at the time, French structuralism. Buddhism's sublimation of the ego as the first step toward the recognition of *sunyata*, emptiness. Hindu and Bud-

dhist emphasis on relation rather than substance. The pluralism and multilingualism of the 20th century. Translation as the creation of a third language somewhere between the "source" and the "target"; and equally, as the creation of a third poet. A collaborative, quadrilingual poem as the expression of an era, rather than an author. The Western adaptation of a traditional Eastern form, applying some of its methods, but few of its rules.

And yet *Renga*, the book, remains a disappointment: the poems lack even the vivacity of the linked haiku collaboratively written by the Beats ten years before. Perhaps the problem is that *Renga* is not renga.

Renga is a chain: a three line haiku by one poet, then two additional lines by the next to form a five-line tanka, then three more lines, added to the two above to form another tanka. Two discrete tanka out of eight lines: the end of one is the beginning of another. And so on forever, or until other more elaborate rules—refined over the centuries—declare the chain is over.

Renga is an endless series of permutations, changing over time. But *Renga* is a group of 28 sonnets in four groups of seven; each author contributing a quatrain or tercet, and the entirety of one of the final sonnets. Unlike renga, the form is closed: the effect is that of four painters, each painting a quarter of 24 canvases (but, unlike the "exquisite corpse," aware of what the others are doing). Canvases that are painted simultaneously, four at a time: the process is visible, but the product is dominant.

Nor do the authors vanish: each is made visible by his language, though there is some leakage from one language to the other, and each is the sole author of one of the sonnets. (Sanguineti's sonnet, however, is silence.) And, stuck in a basement in a Paris hotel, instead of outside where renga is usually composed, the poems are filled with the interior bric-a-brac of four erudites observing, not the moon or the plum blossoms, but each other, writing.

A modern renga would be more like a multi-authored *Cantos*: its end could not be predicted from its beginning; it would often proceed by association; it would be a babble of unidentified voices (its authors, if multilingual, writing in each other's languages); its pace would be that of time-lapse cinematography, a single cell swiftly multiplying into hundreds of organisms; it would be abandoned rather than finished; it would be an emblem of restless change.

Since the mid 1950s Paz has continued to practice haiku and to learn, from Chinese poetry, to record the instantaneous moment in the natural world. Yet he has never indulged in Orientalism. One of his most "Chinese" poems, "Concord" (dedicated to Carlos Fuentes):

Water above
Grove below
Wind on the roads

Quiet well
Bucket's black Spring water

Water coming down to the trees
Sky rising to the lips[16]

takes its first two lines from the *I Ching* (the 28th hexagram, Ta Kuo: "The lake rises above the trees: The image of 'Preponderance of the Great.' Thus the superior man, when he stands alone, is unconcerned, and if he has to renounce the world, he is undaunted.") The poem's middle lines are an observed Indian landscape; its last line one of the most beautiful Surrealist images. And somewhere behind it all, as nearly always in Paz, a tiny piece of Mexico is transformed; in this case, a 1912 poem by Alfonso Reyes, "Cluster of Sky":

Rage above:
Calm below.
Weather vanes rattle,
the blinds weep.

The celestial cattle slowly rise
from the diaphanous courted sheep.[17]

Idle speculations:

Had Paz not discovered the disappearance of the author in automatic writing and renga, would he not have found it in the Nahuatl tradition, which does not distinguish between poet and poem, where a poet can declare: "God has sent me as a messenger./ I am transformed into a poem."? And had Pound not invented the "ideogrammic method," would not Paz have evolved a similar theory, based on the Maya glyph?

The glyphs, after all, like Chinese characters, are conglomerates of component parts: simple pictographs (a jaguar for "jaguar"), phonetic signs (each representing a single syllable), logographs (non-representational representations of a word), and semantic determinatives (specifiers of particular meaning).

For those who cannot read them—and this was articulated most notably by Charles Olson in the Yucatan in the 1950s—the glyphs have a concreteness, a

weight, that does not exist in alphabetic writing: the word is an object. And more: it appears, to the outsider, that each glyph, each word, has the *same* weight. The glyph-covered stela becomes the ideal, irreducible, poem.

For those who can read them—as has become increasingly possible—the glyphs become even more like poetry, for each word could be represented in pictographic, geometric or syllabic form (which corresponds to Pound's *phanopeia, logopeia,* and *melopeia).* There are seemingly unlimited ways to represent any given word, and the continual invention of glyphs was a dazzling display of association, homophony, and punning. Laid out in a grid, these metamorphosing word-clusters could be read in a variety of ways, both horizontally and vertically. The Maya "text," as far as we now know, was a net of continually changing correspondences, and reading an intricate game for skilled players.

There is a line from Palenque to *Blanco* that does not pass through Mallarmé.

4. The figure is the landscape

As an adolescent, Octavio Paz discovers Anglo-American modernism in *The Waste Land.* First visit to India in 1952; the poem "Mutra" is written there. From 1962 to 1968, Ambassador to India. Meets and marries Marie-José Tramini. The poems of *East Slope,* including *Blanco.* The essays on Buddhist logic, Hinduism, caste, published in *Alternating Current*[Corriente alterna, 1967]. In 1969, his major meditation on East and West, *Conjunctions and Disjunctions.* In 1970, Paz organizes the first exhibition of Tantric art in the West, at the Galerie Le Point Cardinal in Paris; the catalog contains the important essay, "Blank Thought" [El pensamiento en blanco]. The same year he writes his "unraveling novel" of a pilgrimage to Galta in Rajasthan, *The Monkey Grammarian* [El mono gramático]. In the 1970s and 1980s, although there are no major poems or essays dealing specifically with India, references, particularly to Buddhism and Tantrism, are made throughout. In 1985 Paz revisits India.

The god Vishnu appears at the cave of an ascetic, Narada, who has been practicing austerities for decades. Narada asks the god to teach him about the power of *maya,* illusion. The god beckons Narada to follow him. They find themselves in the middle of a burning desert. Vishnu tells Narada he is thirsty, and asks him to fetch some water from a village he will find on the other side of the hill. Narada runs to the village and knocks at the first door, which is opened by a beautiful young woman. He stares at her and forgets why he has come. He enters the house; her parents treat him with respect; and the following year they are married. He lives in the joys of

marriage and the hardships of village life. Twelve years go by: they have three children; his father-in-law has died and Narada has inherited the farm. That year, a particularly fierce monsoon brings floods; the cattle are drowned, their house collapses. Carrying his children, they struggle through the water. The smallest child slips away. He puts the two children down to search for her; it is too late. As he returns he sees the other two children swept off; his wife, swimming after them, is pulled under. A branch strikes Narada on the head; he is knocked unconscious and carried along. When he awakes he finds himself on a rock, sobbing. Suddenly he hears a voice: "My child! Where's that water you were bringing me? I've been waiting nearly half an hour." Narada opens his eyes and finds himself alone with Vishnu on the burning desert plain.

Is this not the "plot" of the first two sections of *East Slope?* The book opens with the lines "Stillness/ in the middle of the night"[18]—the poet is alone on a balcony overlooking Old Delhi—and then it immediately fills, overflows, with Indian stuff: monuments, landscapes, a jungle of specific flora and fauna, painters, musicians, gardens, gods, palaces, tombs, philosophy, temples, history, bits of Indian English, a large cast of strange and funny characters—the only characters in Paz's poetry—and, central to it all, the lover/ wife. In the end, in "A Tale of Two Gardens" [Cuento de dos jardines], it all vanishes: "The garden sinks./ Now it is a name with no substance.// The signs are erased:/ I watch clarity."[19] The poet is not in the desert, but in the middle of the equally empty ocean on a boat leaving India. (Although—this being poetry and not philosophy—his wife, rather than Vishnu, is with him.)

Maya is made manifest by time. The Indian cosmos is a map of ever-widening concentric cycles of enormous time: millions of human years with their perpetual reincarnations are merely one day and night in the millions of years in the life of Brahma, who is himself but one incarnation in an endless succession of Brahmas. The function of yoga and other meditation practices is to break out of these cycles of illusory births and rebirths, off the map (out of the calendar) and into the undifferentiated bliss of ***nirvana*** (which the Buddhists would later say was equally illusory).

Myth is a similar rupture of time. Its time is intemporal time, and though its narration unfolds in measured minutes and hours it abolishes time with its narration. Narrator and auditor are projected into a sacred space from which they view historical time and all its products: a world to which they must return, but to which they return educated.

The poem too, though heard in a time that has its own precise measurements (prosody), erases time by projecting us into a world where everything looks the same but is

more vivid, where we speak the language but it doesn't sound like the language we speak, where ideas and emotions become concrete particulars, and the concrete is a manifestation of the divine.

The first two sections ("East Slope" and "Toward the Beginning") of *East Slope* are "travel poetry": a poetry of verifiable landscapes, things and people which are foreign to the author. But they are among the few instances in the last two hundred years of a travel poetry worth reading. (Poets, since the birth of Romanticism, have tended to write their travels in prose and letters.) One reason is its precision of observation, its glittering language, intellectual cadenzas, emotional and erotic rhapsodies. But more: on nearly every page are synonyms of silence and stillness. The poems are simultaneously located in India and in a not-India, a somewhere else.

As Aztec shamans would travel out of the earth to a place where all time was visible in a state of total immobility. There they could observe the life-force of the *tonalli* at any given moment before it occurred in human life. The shaman's task was to alter the tonalli, to effectively rewrite the future.

As the first two sections of *East Slope* observe the world from a world where the wind comes simultaneously from everywhere, where "the present is perpetual" and bodies "weigh no more than the dawn."

Paz, above all, is a religious poet whose religion is poetry. This does not mean that the poet is a "little God," as Huidobro dreamed, with extraordinary powers. Rather it is the poem that opens a hair-line crack in time through which the poet, in astonishment, slips through.

The final third of *East Slope*—the long poem "Blanco"—is both the most "Indian" poem in the book, and the one with the fewest images of India. (In fact, only three words in the poem pertain specifically to India: the *neem* tree and the musical instruments *sitar* and *tabla*. Only three more refer to phenomena that exist in India and other places, but are not universal: *crow, jasmine, vulture.)*

The form of the poem, originally published on a single vertical folded sheet in black and red type—"black and red ink" in Nahuatl means "wisdom"—is usually described as a hybrid descended from Mallarmé's *Un Coup de Dés*. . .and Indo-Tibetan mandalas. Neither is accurate. Mallarmé's poem, though it plays with varying typefaces and blank space, still uses a traditional (though oversize) page as its playing-field: it exists to end up in a book. It is more likely that the Western grandparent of *Blanco* is the original 1913 edition, designed by Sonia Delaunay, of Cendrar's "Prose of the Transsiberian." It too is a floor-to-

ceiling vertical sheet with different typefaces in black and red, but unlike "Blanco" the words are not surrounded by emptiness: every inch is covered with Delaunay's hallucinogenic color, itself a kind of Indian festival.

On the Eastern side, the poem is not really a mandala, although it has been described by Paz as such: mandalas are complex configurations of circles within squares, filled with iconic images of the gods. "Blanco" of course has no gods, other than poetry, and its representational imagery tends to be abstract. The poem, rather, is more like the yogic and tantric vertical scrolls depicting the ascent of the *kundalini* (the "serpent power" of latent energy). Such scrolls represent the human body, though an outline of the body itself is rarely shown. From bottom to top are images of the seven *chakras*, the energy centers that run from the base of the spine to the top of the head, and through which the kundalini ascends during yogic meditation or tantric practice. Each of the chakras has a host of attributes: elements, colors, senses, planets, emotions, philosophical concepts, and so on.

"Blanco," which must necessarily be read down the page (it not being written in Maya) can be seen, loosely, as an upside-down diagram of the chakras. Its first two vertical sections (before it splits into left and right) correspond to the first chakra at the base of the spine, Muladhara, which means "the foundation" (the first two lines of the poem are: "el comienzo/ el cimiento" or "the beginning/ the foundation") and which is associated with the *bija*, the syllable-seed (the next two lines are: "la simiente/ latente" or "the seed/ latent") from which all sound, all language, and everything in the cosmos is born. Other attributes of the Muladhara chakra are the earth ("escalera de escapulario"—an earth-body pun meaning both "mine shaft/ scapulary ladder") and the color yellow (which appears in "Blanco" as the "yellow chalice of consonants and vowels").[20]

From there the kundalini rises as the poem descends through the other chakras—though not strictly: most of the attributes of the chakras are present in "Blanco," though not quite in the same order. It never reaches the final, seventh chakra, the illumination of the void: to do so, in a poem, would be less presumptuous than impossible: at that point poetry ceases to be written. But it does, following this schema, reach the sixth, called Ajna ("power"). That is the point between the eyebrows (the last word of the poem is *mirada*, "gaze"), where all the elements return in purified form (as they do in the poem), and whose "color" is transparency ("transparency is all that remains").[21] Its reigning god is Ardhanarishvara, who is the half-male, half-female incarnation of Shiva, the union of all opposites ("No and yes" and the many other pairs which unite in this section of the poem). And it is associated with *nada*, cosmic sound, which becomes a complex Spanish-Sanskrit pun in

"Blanco": "son palabras/ aire son nada" (with "son" meaning both "sound" and "they are"; "nada" both "nothing" and "cosmic sound"): "sound (they are) words/ air sound (they are) nothing (cosmic sound)." The seed-syllables, though made of air, form words, form the cosmic sound, form the universe. The three are inextricable, and equally illusory: Sanskrit *nada* is Spanish *nada*. (There is a form of meditation, rather like "Blanco," called *nada-yoga*, which consists of focusing on a succession of sounds as they emerge from and retreat into silence.)

Further, in this map of the Hindu body and of "Blanco," there are three "nerves" or "veins" which convey sacred breath and the body's subtle energies. The left, *lalana*, is feminine and associated with the moon, wisdom, emptiness, nature, the Ganges river, vowels. The right, *rasana*, is masculine and associated with the sun, intellect, compassion, method, the Yamuna (the other great river in India), consonants. In the center is *avadhuti*, the union of the two veins and all their attributes. Again, a schema followed loosely in the poem through its left, right and center columns.

The map of the body is a map of the earth is a map of the cosmos (or time) is a map of language. Most of Paz's work is, and has always been, concerned with the tangle of correspondences among these four elements, their identicalness, their transformations into one another. He is surely poetry's primary "inventor of India for our time" (as Eliot called Pound the inventor of China); but he is equally an invention of India: "Indian" readings are possible for poems he wrote long before he went there.

Much has been written about the connections between "Blanco" and the ritual copulation practiced in Tantrism: an escape from the world (and a return to the original unity of the world) through the union of all opposites as incarnated in the actual bodies of the male and female adepts. (The best texts on this are still Paz's pages in *Conjunctions and Disjunctions* and the essay "Blank Thought.")

Robert Duncan, in the era of "action painting" in the 1950s, used to emphasize that the poem "is not the record of the event, but the event itself." "Blanco," though far too structured to be an "event" of writing in the processual sense developed by the Black Mountain poets, demands reader participation in the creation of the text by offering a list of variant readings that is, moreover, deliberately left incomplete. Writer and reader are yet another pair of opposites who unite in the poem. But "Blanco" goes even further: with its male center column and female split columns, it is, uniquely in erotic poetry, a poem that makes love to itself. (As, in India, the syllable-seeds engender language without human

assistance.) The author has closed the door behind him on his way out; the reader may or may not be peering through the keyhole.

Tantric texts are written in *sandha*, which Mircea Eliade translates as "intentional" language. Each word carries a long string of associative possibilities, like those attributed to the three yogic "veins" above: the spiritual words have materialist and erotic meanings, and vice-versa. (The "right-hand" group of Tantrists believes that all of the material words should be taken only as metaphors for the spiritual; the "left-hand" group believes that all of the spiritual words are merely code names for aspects of the rituals, which, like copulation on a cremation ground, are scandalous to outsiders.)

There is a pair of sandha-words in the *Hevajra Tantra* (a line of which Paz rewrites as an epigraph to "Blanco") that is particularly intriguing: *preksana* (the act of seeing) is *agati* (the act of arrival or achievement). In India the primary act of daily worship among Hindus is *darshana* (seeing): it is both a "viewing" of the gods as they are manifest in the temple and wayside images, and something more: in darshana the eyes literally touch the gods; sight goes out to physically receive the god's blessing.

"Blanco" ends at the chakra between the eyes. Its last line reiterates an earlier couplet ("The unreality of the seen/ brings reality to seeing")[22] in the context of a ritualized copulation: "Your body/ spilled on my body/ seen/ dissolved/ brings reality to seeing."[23] The poem, then, never erases the world, never enters the "plentiful void" of nirvana (as the last canto of *Altazor* does: a void filled with syllable-seeds) or the "empty void" of sunyata. In the unreality of the world the poem ends by affirming the reality of a seeing which is touching which is writing.

Tantric art is notable for its representation of the cosmos in a simple or complex geometric drawing: the *yantra*. Paz's India (India's Paz) is a yantra composed of a triangle (seeing-touching-writing) within a square (body-world-cosmos-language) within a circle (which in India stands for a vision or a system—or is it a poet's political button?— or an O for Octavio?).

In the meditation, the yogin imagines a lotus blossoming on his navel. On the petals of the lotus are the letters of the mantra ARHAN. Smoke appears, rising from the letter R. Suddenly a spark, a burst of flame, and the lotus is consumed by fire. The wind picks up and scatters the ashes, covering him from head to toe. Then a gentle rain falls, and slowly washes them away. Bathed, refreshed, the yogin sees his body shining like the moon.

An earlier version of this essay was written for the catalog to the exhibition, "Octavio Paz: Los Privilegios de la Vista," at the Centro Cultural/Arte Contemporaneo in Mexico City.

Notes

1. ¡Aureo espejisimo, sueño de opio,/ fuente de todos mis ideales!/. . ./ ¡Yo soy el siervo de tu Mikado!/ ¡Yo soy el bonzo de tus pagodas!
2. La noche, el lago y la luna/ desde el alto mirador/ ve la princesa Satsuna/ ebria de opio y de amor.
3. Mujeres que pasáis por la Quinta Avenida,/ tan cerca de mis ojos, tan lejos de mi vida. . .
4. *Hai-kai de Euclides.* Líneas paralelas/ son las convergentes/ que sólo se juntan en el infinito.
5. ¡Libro, afán/ de estar en todas partes,/ en soledad!
6. GO/ ZA/ BA/ YO// A/ BO/ GO/ TA// TE/ MI/ RE// Y/ ME/ FUI. [I enjoyed Bogota. I saw you and I left.] The rhyme scheme is ABBBA, BAAB, CDC, DCD.
7. *Nocturno Alterno.* Neoyorquina noche dorada/ *Frios muros de cal moruna/* Rector's champaña fox-trot/ *Casas mudas y fuertes rejas/*Y volviendo la mirada/ *Sobre las silenciosas tejas/*El alma petrificada/ *Los gatos blancos de la luna/*Como la mujer de Loth// Y sin embargo/ es una/ misma/ en New York/ y en Bogotá// LA LUNA. . .!
8. El pequeño mono me mira. . ./ ¡Quisiera decirme/ algo que se le olvida!
9. *El faro.* Rubio pastor de barcas pescadoras.
10. *Tarde.* Leve piel de nube/ donde anda clavada/ la astilla de luna.
11. *Dios que surge de una orquídea de barro.* Entre los pétalos de arcilla/ nace, sonriente,/ la flor humana.
12. Feliz/ de ser india, sonrie/ la mazorca de maíz.
13. En duermevela oigo correr entre bultos adormilados y ceñudos un incesante río.
14. Un sauce de cristal, un chopo de agua,/ un alto surtidor que el viento arquea. . .
15. Noche en los huesos/ noche calavera/ los reflectores palpan tus plazas secretas/ el sagrario del cuerpo/ el arca del espíritu/ los labios de la herida/ la boscosa hendidura de la profecía.
16. *Concorde.* Arriba el agua/ abajo el bosque/ el viento por los caminos// Quietud del pozo/ El cubo es negro El agua firme// El agua baja hasta los árboles/ El cielo sube hasta los labios.
17. *Gajo de cielo.* Abajo, la rabia:/ arriba, la calma./ Las veletas claman,/ lloran las persianas./ / Lentas ascienden las celestes vacas,/ de diáfanos corderos cortejadas.
18. Quieta/ en mitad de la noche.
19. El jardín se abisma./ Ya es un nombre sin substancia.// Los signos se borran:/ yo miro la claridad.
20. Amarillo/ cáliz de consonantes y vocales.
21. La transparencia es todo lo que queda.
22. La irrealidad de lo mirado/ da realidad a la mirada.
23. Tu cuerpo/ derramado en mi cuerpo/ visto/ desvanecido/ da realidad a la mirada.

MICHEL NEDJAR

WHAT DOES THE SPIDER DREAM OF?

(Michel Nedjar Interviewed by Allen S. Weiss)

I replaced the word 'unconscious' with the spider.—Michel Nedjar

ASW—In regard to your dolls, you often speak of mud, shit, blood—of prime matter. What exactly is the meaning of all this for you? How does this enter into the creation of your dolls?

MN—A little while ago, while working on one of my drawings, I asked myself the same question: why, when I was making an entirely black painting, did I want it to be all black, or why use color? I'm speaking of my drawings now, but there is a relation between this and my dolls, as you will see. While making a drawing, I had used red, yellow, blue, and then suddenly, through some malaise, I felt compelled to cover everything with wax and black paint. So I covered everything with black, and then ironed it so that everything would be blended together—and the drawing was all black. I then suddenly had a moment of hope, and I said to myself, "it's bizarre, it's bizarre," and I looked at my dolls, and remembered a childhood game that I played when I was about 4 or 5 years old. At that time, the boundaries separating the gardens where I lived were made with upturned bottles, so that you saw their hollow bottoms. As a child, I put earth and water in them, and made a sort of mud, pretending that it was coffee. And now, I had the feeling of once again finding that mud, which was my favorite childhood game.

ASW—Coffee is a sort of prime matter for you?

MN—The coffee was a pretext; I don't think that it was a prime matter. But all this was already to be found in this childhood game with the earth. Thus I played with this "coffee" with my sisters and brothers; and I still remember that mud, which at the early date I already found to be quite pleasing. More recently, I also wanted to bury my coffee—you see, I'm still playing "coffee"—I mean, I also wanted to bury my dolls. At one point, I even

wanted to rent a place that had a garden, so as to be able to bury them and dig them up a few days later in order to see the work of putrefaction and disappearance. Thus what I sought in my dolls was, we might say, the imitation of putrefaction. Rotting. Decomposing corpses. What I find to be most powerful are those dolls that have been broken or damaged. When I make my dolls I can't use just any cloth; I choose cloth that has already been worn by someone, that has been worn out. Often, when I see dirty, torn clothes in the street, trampled, abandoned, a strong, terrible emotion seizes me—a desire to gather it up in order to save it. I also think that this has something to do with the concentration camps. It operates aesthetically, but I think that it might be something yet more profound.

ASW—Thus there is also an ethical level to all this?

MN—Quite so, quite so; I find a sort of suffering, of abandonment, in broken things. I also gathered many broken objects: I collected them, I saved them, I gave them a magic power—as witness to great pain. It's perhaps also symbolic, I don't know—that's for you to analyse.

ASW—There is a beautiful text by Georges Bataille entitled, *Formless,* where he writes, ". . .affirming that the universe resembles nothing and is only *formless* amounts to saying that the universe is something like a spider or spit." When I read this text I think of your work, precisely because you have taken as your private symbol—of your life or of your work—the spider. And we should also note that your work, both the dolls and the drawings, is often at the very limit of formlessness—related, as you say, to putrefaction. Could you speak a bit about the spider, about how you found it—or how it found you?

MN—Yes, it was rather it that found me. Or we found each other. I had decided to make a film about Paris, and to record the soundtrack in the streets, working without any preconceived project, doing things little by little as they happened. One evening, while strolling on the boulevard in Belleville, I found a small plastic spider, a child's toy. I took it in my hand, and suddenly the title of the film came to me: *A Quoi Rêve l'Araignée? [What Does the Spider Dream Of?]* And as soon as I began to film the images, all the other images followed—like a spider spinning its web. And then I thought of making a film by taking my father's old home movies, made in the 1950s, old films where the images had already begun to disappear; I thus refilmed all of the parts that had become barely visible, which were almost completely erased, my father's clumsiness, and all that. By thus refilming these old films, I told myself that I would braid them together with the film that I was in the process of making on Paris. To lace or braid my film. I thus wove them together with my father's films. That's the word: "weaving"; we return to cloth again. Thus in refilming my father's films—a father who was rather strict and not very pleasant—I gained sympathy

for him, thanks to his clumsiness. And I thought that it's a terrible thing that with the new cinematic machines, we can no longer see such defects. Technical errors, film slipping on the sprockets, and so on—we can immediately erase it. He didn't know how to edit, thus he erased nothing. Thus all those little details of clumsiness brought me closer to my father. Afterwards, with *L'Araignée*—I still had this title in mind—even at night, I dreamed of my film, and the spider led me through my dreams (which I never had before). In one dream, I found myself sucking on a breast, my mother's breast, and I asked myself how I could have forgotten that sensation. I was like a little man in the process of sucking on an enormous breast, and it was fantastic, because, I asked myself, how could I have forgotten that feeling of nourishment and of great warmth, and it was really as if I were sucking on life itself. That was one dream. Two days later, I took the subway, where you see many ad images; sometimes you have the feeling that these images just suddenly appear in a nearly surrealist, or I would rather say magic, manner. I was with my friend Pascal, and there was an ad campaign against breast cancer, with huge images of breasts in all the corridors, and I said to Pascal: tomorrow we'll return to take a photo. Thus he took this photo of me, "Une Habitude à Apprendre à Tout Age" ["A Habit to Get Into at All Ages": the ad's slogan], and the photo was a witness to that moment. Endlessly there were things like that, between the spider, my mother, my father; it all went very far. I then began to complete the film, and a friend invited me to the country, and one evening, while in bed, what do I see on the wall—a very white wall—but an immense living spider! And I told myself that this would be the end of my film. I thus put it in a jar in order to film it, and this is what you see as the very last image of my film; and I knew that the film had to end there—between the imagination and reality, there were the two spiders. From that moment on, I told myself that the spider would be my familiar. It is my artistic symbol, and I think of this little creature making that magnificent structure, that spider's web, that sun, as totally benevolent; it represents life and death.

ASW—I would like to ask you a question about your drawings, especially in relation to the dolls. In a certain sense, this formlessness is situated between the formlessness of creation and the formlessness of death. Thus there exists an entire series of metamorphoses and ambiguities between the two extremes of life: birth and death. But it is also true that you have chosen to represent certain images, certain figures, certain beings—of course there are the dolls, masks and faces; and in the drawings we see especially men, birds, and a very few other types of animals. It is a rather limited iconography. Why have you chosen only these, and not other things?

MN—Yes, there are the birds and the animals, especially dogs. Why? It's not an obsession, though, if I want to do an animal and only do a bird or a dog.

ASW—Not many plants, for example.
MN—No. Rarely plants, or houses; the characters are often accompanied by a bird or an animal, like a fox, or I think it must be a dog. The dog also came in a dream, the dream of the fox who entered through my ear, and who didn't want to leave. But it was my queen who tapped me on the back, and made it leave. I think that I was quite struck by that dream, and the aspect dog-fox-wolf remained imbedded in me.
ASW—And what of the human figure?
MN—The human face fills in the void.
ASW—And what about the relation between your dolls and your drawings? For example, Roger Cardinal wrote of your atelier as a creative matrix of objects, images, sensations and so forth. Could you speak of the effect that working surrounded by all of your dolls has on you?
MN—You know, I don't really notice what is all around me in my atelier, since it is all so much a part of myself; thus I don't extract anything from it. Each piece is a part of me, so I have no distance from it. What I now see is that my drawings are becoming. . .I think of shadows, shadows. I realize that my drawings are of shadows, of silhouettes. The mouth had already disappeared; and now I notice that the entire face has disappeared. All that remains is its presence.
ASW—You say that it is all a part of you, of your life. Yet at the same time, things seem to be divided for you. That is to say, there is the atelier, where we find most of your dolls and your drawings (it's there that you work); and where you sleep, there are your collections of magic dolls, magic or fetish objects, postcards and images. Is there a similar division within you?
MN—When I arrived here, the apartment was already made like that, with the dining room being where I work, and the bedroom; and at one point I realized that I needed a place where I could rest, where I didn't see my work. But I think that if there weren't a wall, it wouldn't bother me at all. I think that I could live in my atelier without any difficulty if it were larger, if there were more space.
ASW—On the matter of titles, I noticed that at Beaubourg your dolls were all given the same punning title, *Chair d'âme* [Flesh of the Soul; Dear Woman—*Chère Dame*]. Did you provide that title? Are there other titles?
MN—It was me: the word *chair* and the word *âme*. Often, when you receive a letter from me, you know that I write *chair ami—cher, âme*. It's thus the game of the flesh, the essential part of work. There is the flesh and the soul; often in one's work there is flesh but no soul; and often there is soul but no flesh.
ASW—This year, 20 of your dolls entered the collection of the Centre Georges Pompidou, in the donation of Daniel Cordier; and about a decade ago your dolls were selected for inclusion in the Collection de l'Art Brut in Lausanne, thanks to Jean Dubuffet. If we consider art history in its present

state, this is somewhat paradoxical; that is to say, your dolls are considered as both Art Brut and as Modern Art. These two collections have very different aims, concepts, and paradigms—thus this is a question about the difference between Art Brut *and* Modern, Contemporary Art, the art of galleries and museums, what Dubuffet termed the "cultural arts." What do you think about all this? Does this amuse you, does it discomfort you, or don't you give a damn about it at all?

MN—No, it doesn't amuse me, and it doesn't discomfort me—it shows me that at a certain point the work is completely independent of the artist. The work lives a life of its own. I really thought that the Musée de l'Art Modern, Centre Georges Pompidou, would never have purchased my work. I think that it appears there thanks to Cordier, because it was part of a donation. It was a private person who bought my work, and I imagine that even he himself must have had some difficulty in having my dolls accepted by Beaubourg. It doesn't amuse me, but it suggests a thousand questions about the work's life, independent of the artist. And now, as for Art Brut and Modern Art, history will decide about that—I can't control it. Daniel Cordier saw my work, was most enthusiastic about it, and he wanted to buy my entire atelier—it's fantastic to have someone so enthusiastic about your work. Jean Dubuffet too was enthusiastic about my work, and wanted it for the Collection de l'Art Brut, and it was fantastic. Thus it's the work that travels—it's not up to me to hold it back, it's now independent of my body, and of my grasp. What can I do? In any case, I don't want to do anything. I prefer to create, to keep busy with that.

ASW—Perhaps in conclusion we can make a list. Both Borges and T.S. Eliot have said, in different ways, that "Every artist creates his own predecessors." What I would simply like to ask you is who are your favorite artists? Let's begin with Art Brut.

MN—What moved me most in art was in about 1969–1970. My sister, a cosmetician, occasionally bought art books. One day she showed me what she had just bought on sale: it was a very luxurious art book, with removable pages of the paintings that were depicted. She showed it to me, and suddenly, amidst all that, what did I see!?—and I didn't believe my eyes, I didn't believe that this could be considered art!—it was one of Aloïse's drawings, *Josephine Lancant des Roses à Napoléon*. And I told myself that if Aloïse is accepted as an artist, then everything is permitted. And during many, many years, Aloïse guided my steps. I was even married to Aloïse. And one day I received a small publication which contained pictures of my works, and alongside my work there was a drawing by Aloïse—for me this was part of the marriage. Something that I have already said to Roger Cardinal is that the greatest emotion I felt in regard to art was that all of a sudden everything was overturned. And during my ten years of travel, Aloïse was with me—the goal of my voyage was Aloïse. It was a bomb, a

bomb inside me, in my head. It was the most powerful thing. Afterwards, I visited many museums—for example, Le Musée de l'Homme, where I was very moved by African and Oceanic art, also a great discovery for me. But in regard to Occidental culture, the greatest thing was Aloïse: it was like a laceration, like a blade thrust to the core, like a bomb; I was completely dynamited by it. It was something that filled me with hope and with happiness. I was married to Aloïse. I was symbolically married to Aloïse. And when I visited the Collection de l'Art Brut, near Aloïse's house. . .you see, that's what desire is; when you desire something so strongly, beyond the historic strata, there are also those things provoked by desire. True, I was at Lausanne, but so what? One can't really know this story, how for so many years it was your desire that guided you; a desire of love, it's really something very, very. . .it's a force, a force that carries you along, that attracts you.

BENJAMIN FRIEDLANDER

FIVE POEMS

THE DECISION

What is a transfer
emotion? why told
this person? I placed
my headlights forth,
a plenitude the misty call

placed into hence
alignments way, sold
to the ends of time. . .

Who, glassed in by pencil markings, knows
all
there is to know, ever & anonymous?

The face in a window, pressed against the glass.
Obstacle, by crowning step, tomorrow

IN A PREVIOUS MANNER OF DUNKAN MkNAUGHTON

I follow chaste springs of human action.

They have turned underground, creeks from which the parkways trickle,

rubbish of an afterthought, immedicinal, & the sheen of water spreading downstream.

Committed to words, a mis-

spelling dragged *gradient* off less than legible nightstand work sheets

we—the thousandfold autonomous readers of the cellar edition unbending

the corner of the page—
might
allege meaning, abjure definition, it is a synonym & fuck all

for the end of time, which I can't anticipate, nor see where the light of long

burnt out stars hits, feeling the weight of a fraction of a second
suspended in time.

Poetry

is a dire navigational scribble. The scribbler

is principally a fool

pseudepigraphal. She walks on ash slipping monosyllable to fettered step,
birds in a marsh, or harmless snakes with red tongues & stinging piss,

the heat of summer after ferocious winter. Car radio a necessity, song

of the open, timing the mileage, highway accessible through static 'got.

Yellow aspen was the color of her name,
& swaying birches I'm allergic to
along the road.

5/88
Oneonta

THE REMAINDER

Placid by its wall
a face again
collides me
at nightfall.

Such sweet repose
magnetized by tears
eyes
once disclosed.

A person is what presence
signifies, whenever a presence
makes itself known
as sign.

A thou, sigh born, robotted

KOL NIDRE

I love God as even guilt can't
assuage my feelings of survival
towards. We live to be judged,
severed from the gravity of human event,

& whether a rip-off quitclaim deed
of broken trust, or gift to man,
the word was spoken by & to the dust
breaking in my heart.

IT GETS THAT I HATE WORDS FOR THEIR ECHOES, DUMB REPETITIONS IN MY HEAD

All I can do is

right

this shit, once a day

forever if need be,

putting head to paper

reading haywire of

present day dis-

affected daytime prose.

The L.B.I.

Annual is a

9 to 5 number & the

daily paper gets out

overnight,

My aim

used to be the latter

& now will type
in the silence

of endless facilitation.

But fuck argument.
News that stays fit

to be tied true is

not news for admitting

evidence against an editor's

views,,

the stupidity of writing

is all the more clear in the lame

notion of depleted topics, the simplicity of seen

summons, not satisfied with bridgework lightcan tunnels

gone through,. Or, *the ingenuities of Miss*

Marianne Moore of Brooklyn, New York, whose immense

girlhood booklearning fills

a single shady

volume to fruition. Post-holocaust,

which earned its name before the ashes had been
stirred (Adorno seems to say), only numbs the dull

familiar ache $'s or some other form of power

sanctifies. Detour propositions

polemically situated, or.

I hate prose

& any other
way around

the block—

MIGUEL ANGEL RIOS: DREAMS OF THE HEIGHTS ("SUENOS DE LAS ALTURAS")

I have a shockingly melancholic image before me: a watercolor by Miguel Rios of a hat in dark space. The dark sombrero, a lost personal object, floats above a doubled landscape of dark trees. In the sky, a few dark clouds seem to double the dark heads of the saturnine and reduced simplicity of the geometric hills. Across the top of the page is a dark but affectionate dedication to a friend, and the words of the dedication are doubled by the artist's signature which appears, almost absurdly decorative, in a diagonal on the hat's top. Superimposed upon the hat is a blue braiding, reminiscent of the transparencies of Picabia, Polke, and Salle, and also the sudden superimposition—though "sudden" may be a clumsy way to render the temporal effects of superimposition—of a gold set of bones which seem to yield the shape of a sacred bird, also dotted with orange, sepia and black geometrical figures.

Miguel Angel Rios is a kind of serial landscape painter, born in North Argentina in 1943, and constantly reiterating the facts of his birth and his childhood around artisans whose crafts he innately adored. I do not want these things, he has told me, I paint them quite naturally. He asserts that he is not from Buenos Aires, but emerges from a tradition at the height of 5000 metres above the sea.

Rios keeps in his studio and at home enormously interesting albums of his life amongst the sublime and sublimely blank mountains of the region. This early landscape of almost terrifying scale and scope is one of the places to initiate a sense of the epical in his paintings. He has also placated any sense one might have of him as "warbling his woodnotes wild" by training himself for a complex voyage outside of this sublime blankness, by populating much of his early youthful and mature years by turns in the urban academies, teaching in Buenos Aires and at the University of San Carlos in Mexico. Obviously, there is a curious torment in Rio's life, a tension between the urban and his much-underscored "roots," a word he uses with and without irony. The irony of a deraciné and weightless nomad lies about Rios and informs the multiplicities within his own work.

He does not have the whimsical free-associative spiel of the Jonathan Borofsky paintings of dreams he admires. What he offers is "Landscape from the top," in his own formulation, a dream-voyage from the heights like the bardic *Macchu Picchu* of Neruda. The voice is however writerly, diagrammatic and concise. He is never bombastic and retains the possibility of the intimate and the elegiac. He sketches and works ceaselessly, and is confident at the scale of fourteen feet square. But even his small sketches, tacked to the walls of his studio, are filled with a remorseless strength. There are skeletons fighting à la Goya. Energetic hats taking off with a vigor of their own. Grinning bones subtitled "Who am I," with the proverbial concision of *Los Caprichos.*

In Rios, one may witness a translation of Incan epic in his own terms, and with his own theory and theoretical poetry. What he retains is the sense of the sacred center, now deformed and mutilated: the theme of the hero, now pulverized like a sombrero and into a fetish of the fractured self: and the community, now dispersed like a myth. The map in a melancholic dream replaces the homeland; the fetish replaces the ego; and the exchange of art alone remains as a mistranslation of the communitarian story. But we cannot hold it against our painter, anymore than we should against Pound, that he couldn't make a contemporary epic or Paradise in a coherent mode. The acoherent lyric-epic alone remains, jagged and monochrome and replete with systems that are reminiscent more of breakdown than of order. Picasso seems to have learned from African art that the power of art lies precisely in its truth-making magical function rather than descriptive or aesthetic. Rios once placed grains into a picture that mice ate. The idea of a living painting sustaining the creaturely world is a parable in memory of painting.

Rios is a serious artist in an epoch of the whimsical, the simulated and the diffuse. His concentrated focus leads even in his works of systematic multiplicity to a sombre species of irrealism. He is a colorist, but his colors tend canonically toward those of the earth. He could paint, and has, in concrete, in cement, in terra cotta as medium. He is, in a sense, an earth artist, and the same laws of ecological pathos that regulate the Romantic anti-sublime of Smithson and Heizer regulate his monuments, his mountains and his sketches. He works with an assistant on large works, with instruments and tools reminiscent of his artisanal past. New sculpture shows his ability to work with graceful and yielding pinks and forms that are suddenly disturbed by a penetrating spear. His watercolors have the finesse he admires in Klee and Kandinsky, and they show the Japanese calligraphic possibilities always inherent in his incised forms. His use of ink and melancholy watercolors may remind some of the instantaneities of Guston and Johns, just as the series of "personal hats" or "personified hats" may remind one of Guston's simplified imagery.

Like Jean-Michel Basquiat's best art, the art of Rios is a complex intransigent act, seen in his recent "Self-portrait" as a menacing skeleton amongst flutes like phalluses and hats like grave-mounds. His language floats in Spanish and English as a macaronic code to his rootless and rooted condition. Rios is elaborating a macaronic art of bilingual pleasures as a great antidote to the limited perspectives, one might say one-eyed perspective of the West. His great staring skeleton is very alive and the lyric landscape that surrounds it is part of a hymn to the earth, what Mallarmé called "the orphic explanation." His "dreamtime" landscapes are closest to Australian Papunya Tula styles in positing a relationship between land, line, and language. "Two Dreams and a Long Road" is a meditation on the relationship between a seemingly reverential and referential mapping code and the fractures of a consciousness that cannot be signalled. As if in response to Jasper Johns, it is a white map of South America; it is a map on which the natural has almost engulfed the cultural; it is late and early "writing" confronting each other.

A unique accomplishment of Rios is his ability to use words and images without a sense of creating a false decoration through language and without illustrative reduction. In a sense, he has been for many years now a "New York painter," as much as late Mondrian. One might do an interesting study of his most recent works in comparison with the late representational études of Mondrian, who claimed with good reason that he was the true surrealist. Rios has been able to make his almost canonic code of dots and circles into something as menacingly urban as the "little squares" of the anti-canonic *Broadway Boogie Woogie.* He is never as utopian and affirmative as that great modernist, and his sense of dystopia, of an "architecture of pessimism," in Hejduk's terms, make his city-paintings of night and poetry uncanny for those used to the fairly affirmative and complaisant abstractions of the day. Rios is not posing as an outsider; like Benjamin, he uses his social and cultural position to give him a true critical distance from the fleeing multitudes and false multiples of a degraded day.

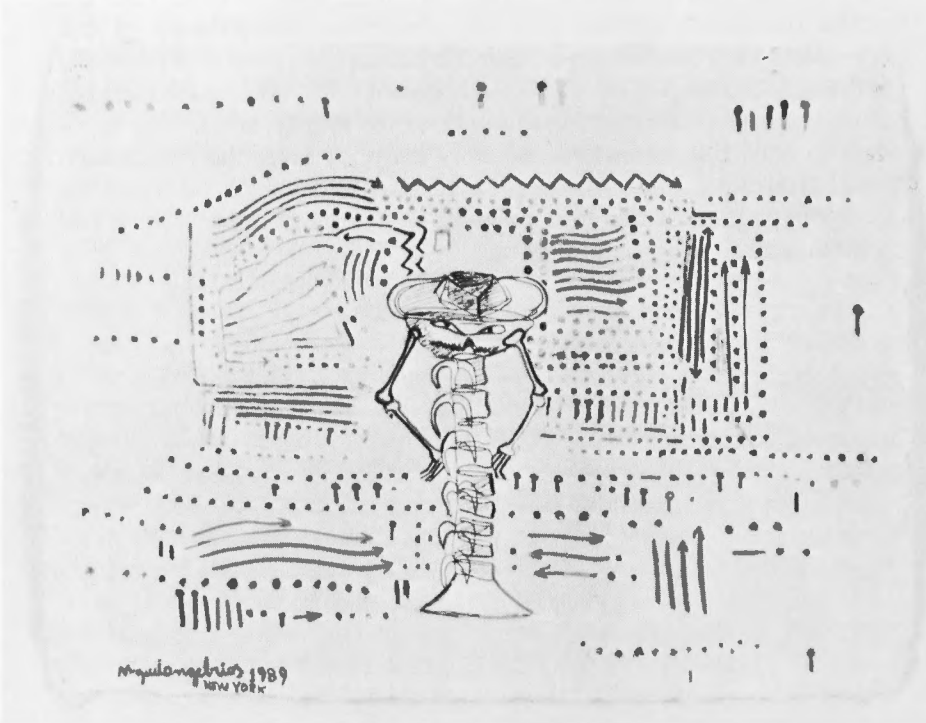
In Rios, the full force of his sense of what was lost in the transitions between archaic, modern and so-called "post-modern" receive a treatment in novelistic scope that is simply not part of the experience of most American painters, representational or not. He has a scope that is obviously closer to the epical in Marquez, and his lyricism is always, I think, a quality subordinate to this epic sense. Therefore, his best works tend to be the past tense of an historical impersonality cited by Jakobson as the syntax and semantic force of all true epics. Epic story-telling in painting in our day is almost unimaginable in the West.

The small pieces of Rios are proverbs or aphorisms, the large sculptures and paintings are the entirety, the web, the life consumed.

"Yesterday I dreamed I was Flying Over my House" is a recent example of this kind of completeness, this radical story-teller's completeness. It is an abstract and refulgent map of a shamanistic or shaman-like journey. It is the journey of displacement that anthropologists have discerned as the spiritual message in every voyage. Flying over one's own house, comical as a mother-in-law in a Thurber cartoon hovering over a castrated *casa*, here one sees nothing but a multiplicity. One's house has become the "cubist effect" of Gertrude Stein observing from a plane. What we have is not the belated excoriating eroticism of the shameless late painters of our imperium, New York. We are far from the bland perfections of Warhol. We are flying over a map of the desiccated personal. We have nothing left but the story, like the Hasid who has forgotten how to pray, where to pray, or when to pray, but remembers the story and thus saves the community. Wiesel: God created man in order to have stories told. In Rios, we are seeing the advent, again, of narrative painting, deleting the lesser ironies and promoting a sense of the true ones.

MIGUEL ANGEL RIOS

SIX WORKS

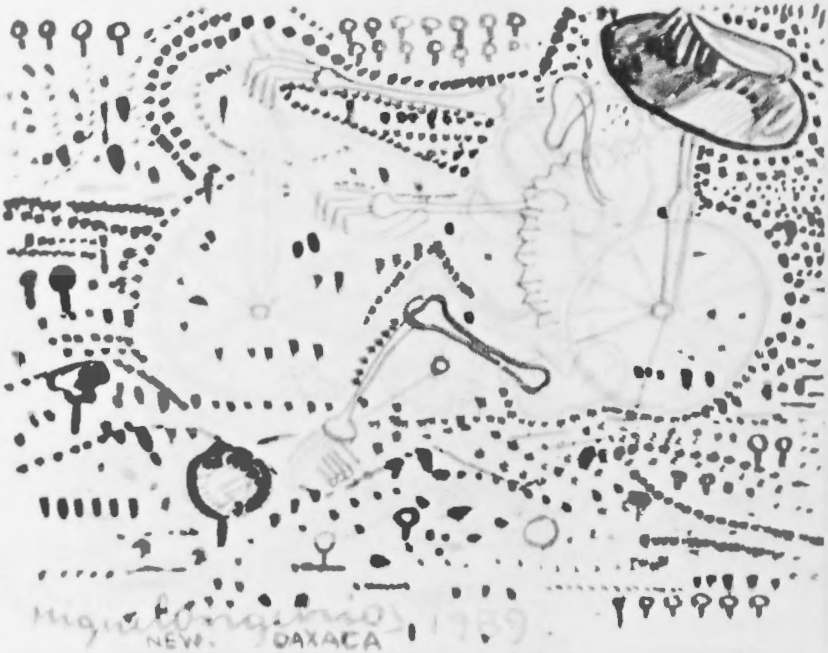


AUTORETRATO IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE

1989, m/m on handmade paper, 10" x 13"

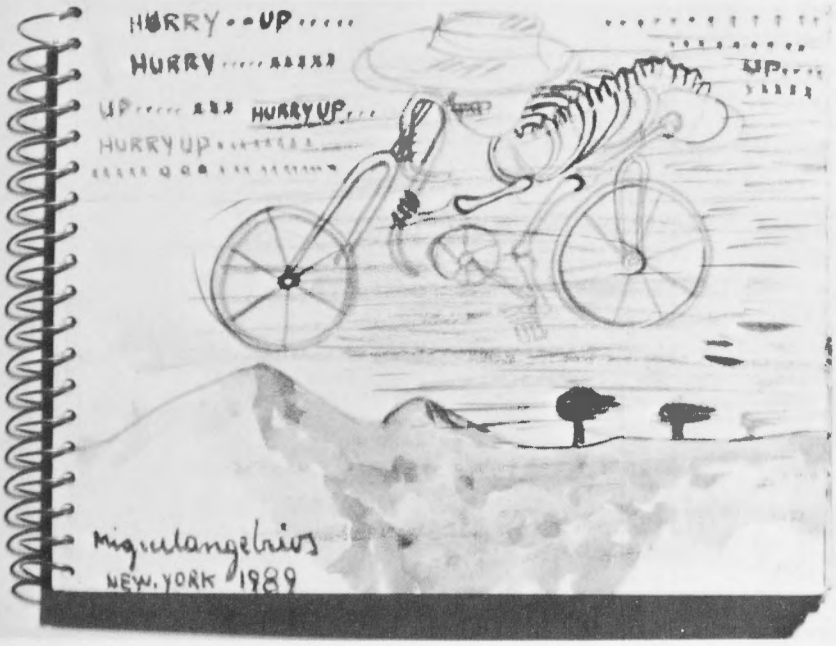
MY HAT

1989, Watercolor on Paper, 5 1/2" x 8 1/2"



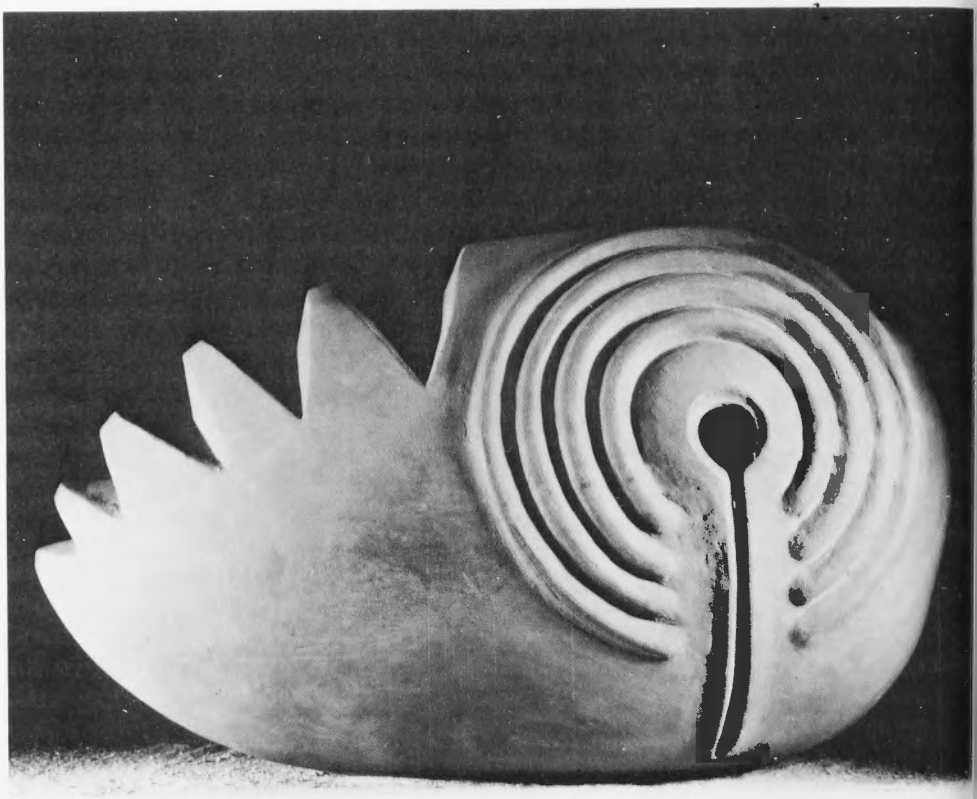
STUDY FOR ONE PAISANO/DRUNK & HAPPY

1989, Watercolor on Paper, 6" x 8"



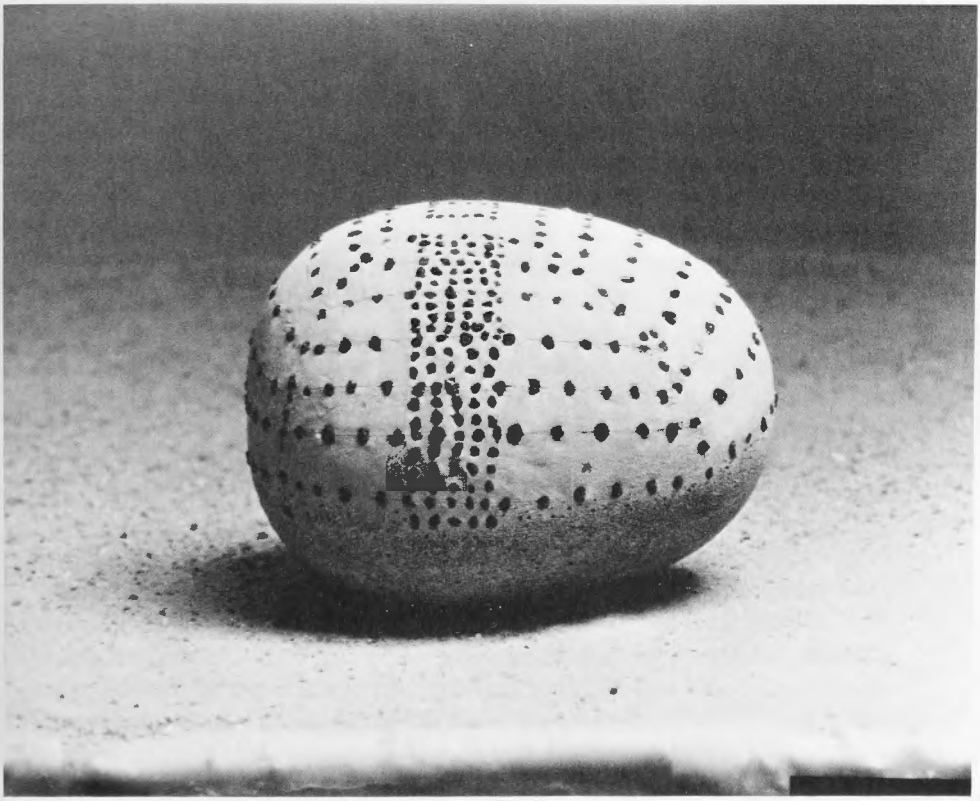
STUDY FOR PERSIGO O ME VIENEN PERSIGUIENDO

1989, Watercolor on Paper, 6" x 8"



LA CABEZA DEL MONSTRUO CHAYLE

1988, Ocotlan Clay and Mica,
85 cm x 55 cm x 52 cm



HORMIGUERO

1987, Terra-cotta and Tezontle,
9" x 7" x 7"

PAUL CHRISTENSEN

STRUGGLING TO BE A COURTIER: THE POETRY OF RICHARD WILBUR

Forty years of Wilbur's poetry are wedged into this book of nearly four-hundred pages. It reprints his previous six volumes and adds to it twenty-eight new poems and a patriotic new cantata that could hide easily in a Paul Green play. It is the canon of a scrupulous craftsman, a poet who did not rush into print but polished one poem roughly every month over his long writing life. The awards Wilbur garnered from this steady preoccupation with poetry are remarkable: the Pulitzer Prize, a National Book Award, the Bollingen, a Ford Foundation grant, fellowships from Guggenheim and the *Prix de Rome,* membership in all the arts academies in America, teaching posts at some of the most exclusive universities—Harvard, Wellesley, Wesleyan, and Smith—and the poet laureateship of the U.S. It has been a charmed life, a career in the obscure art of poetry welcomed, awarded, celebrated in a country noted for its callous indifference to literature.

Where others with more talent or more genius or more tragedy lived and died in relative obscurity, Wilbur came onto the literary scene in 1947 with a little book called *The Beautiful Changes* and was almost instantly a star. So America was looking for a Wilbur to take into its arms; but it was not looking for some of the other poets who crowded into the years just after World War II. Those poets—Jews, Beats, bohemians on the social fringe, blacks, homosexuals and lesbians, iconoclasts, second or third generation immigrants, an alleged traitor, experimenters—were overlooked or benignly neglected much of their lives.

Wilbur, on the other hand, was a New Englander, a Harvard-educated, handsome young veteran who had seen action in Italy, France and Germany, and had come home to resume his place among the New England gentry. Already, at twenty-six, he had the dry, sophisticated humor, the quick common sense, the *charm* of the ruling class, from whose ranks Jack Kennedy and Robert Lowell also sprang. Wilbur was ornately stylish and formalistic in his earliest verses, but down to earth, a pragmatist in his affections:

NEW AND COLLECTED POEMS (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), cloth: $27.95. 393 pages. ISBN 0-15-165206-6

Does sense so stale that it must needs derange
The world to know it? To a praiseful eye
Should it not be enough of fresh and strange
That trees grow green, and moles can course in clay,
And sparrows sweep the ceiling of the day?

The Beautiful Changes is the book of a courtier, a young man whose cultivated voice could be trusted to speak for the American character in the heady days of post-war expansion. Wilbur stood for the continuity of English custom, culture, and grace in the long transatlantic descent to New England and modern imperial America. He was the Anglo-American ideal, whose powers to console and delight the social elite were surer and more reliable than Lowell's, whose temperament was fairly unpredictable after 1959. Indeed, Wilbur has stayed well clear of the Confessionalists all through his career; as late as his most recent poetry, he dismisses Plath's poetry, in "Cottage Street, 1953," as "free and helpless and unjust." Edna Ward, to whom she is compared for soundness, lived "eight and eighty summers of / Such grace and courage as permit no tears." So much for Plath, or the dark world of suicide, drunkenness, the maunderings of spoiled Anglo-American gentry.

Wilbur's poetry presents a disembodied self, a figure of mere consciousness present in but not necessarily connected to the world. He is *there,* in the midst of the not-I, a landscape, an object, an abstraction like the "terrible streets" that opens "The Peace of Cities"; but unlike the reporter at-the-scene of Olson, Duncan, or Snyder, who is transformed by what he experiences, Wilbur's narrator converts the scene into an image of his own emotions, a portrait of the self-mastering Christian soul. The scene beheld in Wilbur's poetry is usually allegorical of some struggle within—between the forces of darkness and chaos, doubt or disintegration, and those of light, reason, pleasure, or serenity of mind. His poem "Objects," also from *The Beautiful Changes,* closes this way:

. . .is there any end to true textures, to true
Integuments; do they ever desist from tacit, tragic
Fading away? On maculate, cracked, askew,

Gay-pocked and potsherd world
I voyage, where in every tangible tree
I see afloat among the leaves, all calm and curled,
The Cheshire smile which sets me fearfully free.

Another of more recent vintage, "C Minor," puts it thus:

. . .A human soul,
Though stalked by hollow pluckings, winning out
(While bran-flakes crackle in the cereal-bowl)
Over despair and doubt?

Wilbur's soul is not of this world, only a prim and sexually uncomplicated visitor who sniffs around and perceives most things in terms of its own well-being. Experience in this poetry is a form of self-consolidation: the imagination seems attracted to some discordant note in the world which it harmonizes with its prescriptive ideals; the world is healed by asserting one's faith in its underlying or overlying order. In "A Dubious Night," discord comes from feeling a little too secure in the order of things, as he notes in closing, "I weary of the confidence of God." Or this from "Children of Darkness," a rare excursion into the darker side of life, with this reassuring coda:

Light strikes into a gloom in which are found
Red disc, grey mist,
Gold-auburn firfoot, amethyst,
Food for the eye whose pleasant stinks abound,
And dead men's fingers break the ground.

Gargoyles is what they are at worst, and should
They preen themselves
On being demons, ghouls, or elves,
The holy chiaroscuro of the wood
Still would embrace them. They are good.

The beautiful changes are those occurring within the speaker, who appears to be healing after war experiences, and whose resilient idealism wins out at last. He sloughs off war wounds and disillusionment to emerge re-consolidated in the old faith, a loyal, charming citizen who has proved his valor and whose well-bred character returns from war intact.

That premise runs against the tide of almost everything else written about World War II: the novels, plays, poems, short stories and reportage all seem to attest to the ugly changes, the soul wounded and emptied of its faith in the old order. Any war usually prompts the young to battle and brings them home angry at their elders, disgusted with the way things are, bitter and driven with revolt. Wilbur gives us a floaty, angelic voice that comes back annealed by its own fantasy, its naive idealism and frilly daydreams over nature. In "Poplar, Sycamore," the allegorizings are all dizzy-headed until we reach this direct address to the sycamore,

Be such a deep
Rapids of lacing light and dark,
My eye will never know the dry disease
Of thinking things no more than what he sees.

Wilbur's soldier-poet went through the war, it would seem, inventing allegorical harmony out of all the suffering and chaos, and came back to report on the "beautiful changes" he had experienced. According to Wilbur, paradise is artificial, not jagged, as Pound, Zukofsky, Olson, and Snyder would have us believe. The perfect and sublime arise from mind and stout religious sense; they are not our fleeting glimpses into nature's own ordering energies, from which, as Pound would say, we copy our frail ideals.

The epistemology of Modernism and postmodernism and of the conventional American poetry Wilbur writes are diametrically opposed; there is no common bond between them. The one derives from a post-Christian, proto-paganist vision of nature as its own animating creativity, and the other from a long monotheistic tradition that has narrowed order and creativity down to human rationality. Consciousness is the god of Christianity, perfect and absolute consciousness; poems in the Anglo-American tradition are hymns to the masculine powers of mind that sort and arrange experience and affirm the authority of a great overseer, an infinitely rational god whose powers exceed those of all the other gods, male and female, whose domains are in the irrational.

For nearly four hundred pages, Wilbur is himself in control, plotting his poems to set measures, arranging, cutting, shaping his stanzas according to a regularizing scheme, a god-author in microcosm imitating divinity in the Christian cosmos as he idealizes experience, then shapes it according to the adamant categories of common sense, clear-headed reason, propriety, all the virtues of the aspiring Christian soul. England invented this rational god with his managerial imagination, a necessary deity for running a vast maritime organization, and Anglo-Americanism struck a partnership by sharing this god and its mercantile values. So Wilbur's spirituality stems from orthodox British Protestantism, just as his poetics come down whole from four centuries of English lyricism.

But for Wilbur not any England will do as the root on which to graft his vision; the England after industrialism is generally ignored in the spectrum of his references. Like Eliot before him, Wilbur seemed to know instinctively that one's Anglo-Americanness must derive from a *pure* English source—Elizabethan, Shakespearean England. Wilbur's heroes are literary; the character of his own "figure" in the poetry is drawn from English literary perspective. Thus, grace is equated with Hamlet's thinking, "The intricate neural grace in Hamlet's head"; the warring spirit with

Prince Harry in "Up, Jack" from the *Henry* plays; beauty with formal gardens and country estates; love with the cool formality of Shakespeare's sonnets. These and other connections to Shakespearean England are part of the fantasized world of Wilbur's speakers, who seem convinced they live in slightly modernized Stratford. Corresponding to the faded scenes in Wilbur is the faded language, which loses its freshness the more it is squeezed into the exacting and ornate forms he works in. Inversions, added syllables, a bit of rusty eloquence are part of the upholstery in these poems.

There is something else working below the surface of this fantasizing in the early (and late) Wilbur. Drawing upon Elizabethan literature as the substrate of his own vision, he (as Eliot before him) found a period in life when males were in some sense the effeminate rivals of their powerful regent, Elizabeth. Courtiers were essentially asexual males who had cultivated their manners to the point of hermaphroditic ambiguity, which they expressed through an elaborate narcissism that often rejected the female as lover. The sexual ambiguity of Shakespeare's sonnets is a point of issue, as is the theme of transvestite identity in the plays. The courtier in white hose, satin pants and lacy shirt and waistcoat, his perfumes and periwig, his scented handkerchief in sleeve, are all aspects of a male whose envy of a reigning monarch took the form of sexual escape. The Earl of Leicester's private affair with Queen Elizabeth the first was in effect an indefensible aspect of his character, a secret dimension of his masculinity subject to rumors. It is this epicene hero who reenters as the personae of Eliot, Wilbur and their Anglo-American colleagues, and who echo the misogyny of their forebears. Anglo-Americanism is adamantly anti-female, perhaps the most characterizing trait of its perspective on the world.

But there's a final, subtly political aspect to the use of Elizabethanism in modern Anglo-American poetry. Shakespeare's days mark the apex of English maritime culture; it would never be richer, leaner, or more aggressive than at this dawn of its imperial ambitions. By the time Tennyson celebrated the empire, it was doddering and corrupt, barely able to protect its sea lanes and harbors, with other industrial rivals bearing down on its monopolies. Consider Wilbur's situation at mid-century as another debut: the era of American empire fortified esthetically by a steady spate of "real culture" lifted directly out of the English debut of Shakespeare's time. Eliot's "Four Quartets" celebrate the Anglo-American heritage during the war, the same catastrophic climax that shaped Wilbur's imagination and racial values. As literary defenders of empire in the British tradition, both poets inevitably brought the issue of pure race into their poetry in numerous subtle ways. Auden's emigration to the U.S. coincided with Eliot's culminating hymn to his transatlantic identity just as Wilbur was

writing his own first poems on this fusion of bloodlines. The Anglo-American assertion of an Aryan purity of spirit and heritage in belles-lettres was grimly prefaced in Hitler's attempts to purge the German race of its own non-Aryan intruders. Empire depended for its strength of character on a pure-blooded race, whose superiority of mind and spirit were measured in terms of English cultural ideals.

Hence, as Wilbur spins out the fantasized meditations of his ethereal voices, turning landscapes into self-portraits of a perfected consciousness whose every syllable was tucked neatly into rimed, metered language and whose tolerance of the slightest deviance from expectation was itself one of those charming traits of the privileged white class in America, the U.S. doggedly pursued its turn at imperial expansion under the puritanical statesmanship of John Foster Dulles. (The really rough stuff of empire was handled by his brother Allen, who had been recruited to organize and run the CIA.)

Turning the pages of Wilbur's poetry from those early lyrics of 1947 to *Things of This World* published in 1956, to the collections published in the 1960s, *Advice to a Prophet and Other Poems* (1961) and *Walking to Sleep* (1969), there are no political poems or direct commentaries on the upheavals of the era. Wilbur's fantasy grows thicker with time: in "Sonnet," included in *Things of This World,* the description of rural New England is rank sentiment shorn of the irony of even Frost's rural sketches, as in "After Apple Picking," depicting a country evening even Hogarth or Pope or perhaps Ben Johnson would have doubted the truth of:

> The winter deepening, the hay all in,
> The barn fat with cattle, the apple-crop
> Conveyed to market or the fragrant bin,
> He thinks the time has come to make a stop,
>
> And sinks half-grudging in his firelit seat,
> Though with his heavy body's full consent.

Here, without apologies, is a Currier & Ives' America, a dinner-plate version of a long-departed New England, vanished even before Whittier wrote his sugary reminiscences of it, and written about the time Lowell began framing his nightmares against its pretentious village life. But with Wilbur there is no room for irony: his meditative, self-consolidating witness is a kind of Blanche DuBois, whose lyrical digressions into romance can never be countered.

The opening poem of *Walking to Sleep,* "The Lilacs," reflects no more of the Vietnam era than to imagine how

Those laden lilacs
    at the lawn's end
Came stark, spindly,
    and in staggered file,
Like walking wounded
    from the dead of winter. . . .

A few pages later, we are settled once more into the fantasy mode Wilbur knows best:

Why is it that whenever I talk with the duchess
My belly growls and my nose waters? Why must it
Be my hand that tumbles her wine-glass over
Into the Cellini salt-dish?
Stiff as a gaffer, fidgety as a child,
After twenty years of struggling to be a courtier
I remain incapable of the least politeness, . . .

What you will perceive in this and all his other books is an indifference to the dark negatives of American history, to those events or changes that call into question the service this poetry renders as reassurance to a literate, ruling elite. Instead, its language is strewn with lapidary imagery and garden scenery, with a constant flow of rhetoric furnishing images of the rare, the beautiful, the perfected character, manners, customs of the social few, whose models have been carefully culled from "polite" literature. Indeed, such is the charm and persuasion of this writer of race lyrics that he more or less created the taste for poetry that has reigned ever since *The New Yorker, The Atlantic,* and now in *APR, Antaeus, Poetry,* and numerous other quarterlies that strive to appeal to the same literate elite. What John Cheever once did for *New Yorker* fiction, Wilbur did for *New Yorker* poetry, and for what now passes as "official" American verse in anthologies and textbooks. He shaped the peculiar fantasy-life verse, its esthetic gospel that the mind is the creator of meaning, not its modest interpreter or translator. His landscapes are almost always those which human agency has formed or "improved," from which his meditations arise.

But Wilbur's poems do not linger in the garden long enough to analyze or parse things into their psychological data. Wilbur's thinking veers sharply away from James or from that portion of him that comes down to Ashbery, who minces their certainties into final mocking ambiguities. Instead, there is this rose-tinted vision of a well-meaning natural event:

Into the lower right
Square of the window frame
There came
with scalloped flight

A goldfinch, lit upon
The dead branch of a pine,
Shining.
and then was gone.

Was it manifestly real—this bird—sufficient as, say, a sunrise is in Snyder's poetry? No,

It was like glancing at rough
Sketches tacked on a wall,
And all
so less than enough

Of gold on beaten wing,
I could not choose that one
Be done
as the finished thing.

It is cruel work to take Wilbur's diverting little poems, songs, sonnets, odes, his elaborate translations of French and occasionally Russian poetry, the little dialogue poems and riddles, and subject them to grim scrutiny for their historical content, their participation in the bitter ideological wars that have been waged since the end of World War II. And it would be pointless perversity to go in and find the poems irresponsible bits of fluff and evasion, had not the country itself rewarded it so profusely and so often through Wilbur's career. This was the music it preferred to those citizens who might offer instead some well-reasoned and frankly realistic portrayal of America's failings, its suffering spirit, its morass of unresolved conflicts, its tragedies as a rough new imperial power in the world. This soothing counselor appealed more to its ear simply because it offered such blandishments and flattery to its image as England's successor. With poets like these, no wonder the nation could squander all of its affections over the blatantly incompetent leadership of John F. Kennedy, another New Englander with charm, good looks, the reassuring poise that called forth images of a prince.

JEAN-PAUL AUXEMERY

FIVE POEMS

(Tr. from the French
by Richard Sieburth)

FUTILE ODE TO NOBODY

(in the manner of Alvaro de Campos)

Pessoa, you are nothing
but the dust kicked up in the street
by a gob of spit, the ash of a cigarette
flicked by a dilettante onto the deck
of a ship bound nowhere

Days and days ever turning the same way
Pessoa, days that double for days
given a single day how easy to build a theory of days
each exactly one and the same
each approaching the basic nothingness of this single day
flicked by the finger
of this man I picture
on the deck of a ship with no destination
fully aware of the nobody he is

The street is this stationary ship
and pedestrians walk its futile wake
and Pessoa, star of spittle in the dust
pseudonym for absence
I salute you

From *Le feu l'ombre*

NOMMO

their features were those of man and snake
their color green their bodies sleek and covered
with hair also green, their eyes
not unlike human eyes but
red in color and their tongues forked,
their breasts human breasts but
the lower portion of their bodies akin to the snake and
their arms supple and extending into
webbed hands, each equipped
with a double sex, each present
wherever humidity is present, each
having been born out of the damp
of their father's seed and copper is their excrement and
when the sky is faint with fog
the copper solidifies in the sun's
rays, for they are also light,
offspring of Amma and of earth,
and their word was the first word
word of the beginning

"In San Francisco Segalen"

In San Francisco Segalen acquires
the implements of Letters
in Chinatown:

the slate cup to thin the ink
the brush with bamboo shank
paper

No gods.
Only Characters having meaning.
Where are signs
is sense.

Atelier.

The traveller

wen
alone

ALLEGORY

Further West, the Mountain: either Jade or Smoke.
The resident of the Mountain resembles you: she roars:
Her hair is disheveled and covered with ornaments;
In her breast she nurtures a desire for the Five Mutilations:
A Desire she bears like the Child who will give her birth.

STELAE

The Shulamite captivated the second Adam,

Sophia lost and found

***

he shall be thy groom, Guinevere, do not surrender the sword

***

the narrow valley of oleander leads to the moist cave
Eurydice, Eurydice, snake

***

and my tree and my lake and my tree and my lake

Bod Yul, land of snows, go buck naked

***

En route:

to the south to the north of the river, willow shadow on the
banks:
the traveller's steps spell out the alphabet of trees;
the ashes of his body shall one day mingle with the river;
before it is consumed, time repeats.
(Wang Ngan-che, 1021–1036)

***

Es-Saouira:

the wind combing forth a spike of foam
against the grain of the wave

***

Uxmal under the storm of the esplanade
at the Square of the Nuns this snaky
path and to be at last able to say
masks you have now released us
from your cruel condescension

***

Empedokles-child-Reason

***

Tristan, her beauty renders all women fair

***

the peak "she who loveth silence"

***

knock every needle off its rocker

***

I have undone your loincloth Africa
I have ploughed your blunt beauty

***

the lioness waits in the dark—kiss her on the mouth

***

the end of Time—
crystal blackbird frantically crying out to the sky

***

As it reached the sea of the Cyclades
the ship shouldered its way
through the herd of waves

***

I see the mask I see myself facing myself
You look familiar

***

birdwing with a human face
argues with a sycamore sprig

***

laterite
soil without and men
with thirst

***

multiply persons

***

locate

***

in earth's vulva, lake of salt and wings

***

name is seed, number form

***

Disaster

CLICK-ROSE 2
(X–XIII & XV–XIX)

(Tr. from the French by Keith Waldrop)

X

Phone the s-
Ound technician
Rose O your stocking in runs
O your riffs Sonia your ostinato
To the edge of the page line by line without stepping on the brake without stopping to love what you love
The poem puddle of oil the moon hypnotizes and sips or staves in

XI

Rose zooming on the thing zeroing in on
Now we have to put up with close-up the grain of your skin frightening so near without my being able to move close

XII

Uprooted uprooter
Do you last no hardly even the memory of you
Do you intensify the time you do last yes are you very hard yes
Rose-Rilke
Lashing about on the white of the page without leaving hell
Lashing out wilting then out with a violence before perishing
Within the space whose very divorce it is
You are interior and exterior moving me out of death's reach
You are room and window and view of the landscape and of
indoors
By the uprooting window

XIII

Rose then hissing in space like a hot iron in water
Grandmother's neck-piece my gauge of the past

XV

To the poem I read in the making
Rose gorged with herself weeping in its nowhere
Contribute limpid efficient the words that are not there could have been there have been taken out would have been there if the words which will never be there are the words of the poem
Rose of November riding the rim all of an afternoon unseasonably hot terrifying which the others as close as they are have not been through

XVI

Rose aye (aye from I'm there)
Rose full margin tail-wind begins to blow and you haven't budged I cried out but you didn't budge you cried while I was taken off
There where everything is invisible everything normal but where something's visible there are changes
Where I'm going do you think it's there I'd like to go from where I am where I am is it where you are
Rose cooped up outdoors
There since there's no more comparable well then we know the great suffering since we can't we don't do all we could to suffer less (nobody strikes me harder no one could hurt me less than you) that's not the point we do all we can to be there which means we're honest

I'll cut us out with the blow-torch if you're game since you're the
blow-torch rose carve out the void for an exit and while
you're there blow all the images up nothing of the poem's
structure will collapse
Is there something can't be blown yes the blow of blows you the
image itself identifiable with everything in that sense I'm not
afraid whereas as for you
The aye of there I am you assail it rose oxyhydrogen blow-torch
Always at your labors and at nobody's

XVII

That night I ran after you things you have to do you do quickly
O rose right there
Rose O column of air the poem's structure (how learn to unwrite
and will I get better how to come closer without writing)

XVIII

: The world spun round where I wasn't prepared
Relation to the region has changed my connection has become
objective I spread things about I flatten life without
commentary

Rose of unwriting finally the world spins without my wanting it to (so many years needed to quit wanting well yes to stop hoping) round about your light on the object which turns opens out abstracts (the light and the object so make those plural)

Change of light change of object it's the rule change of palette change of object and this light you are the only one who knew how not to project it hello sponge

XIX

Ronsard's has stuck its head out the door which doesn't shut Ronsard's sang

Rose T tea rose rose the rose thou not you I-beam rose abysm

Speak to men with the full volume of your *vous*-saying rose of the past speak to men since you are indivisible

The opposite of present is absent the opposite of absent is certain days the past idle is the opposite of the presence of the rose

EAST BERLIN SECTION

RODERICK IVERSON

INTRODUCTION

I stand in the high-ceilinged grey antechamber in line with the others waiting to pass into one of the narrow metal doorways where, from the other side of a glass partition, the East German official will stare with unblinking thoroughness at my passport, then raise his eyes to stare at me with slow unblinking clinical attention to assure himself that I and my photograph are the same person, then take my five West-Mark visa fee and buzz open the metal door at the further end of the cubicle through which I'll move on to the booth where I'll pay my mandatory currency exchange of twenty-five West-Marks to receive twenty-five East-Marks. I am in the Friedrichstrasse border crossing which I've reached by walking upstairs from the West Berlin U-Bahn (subway) stop which is on one of the two lines which run under East Berlin. It's December of 1988 and I'm going to the first truly public, officially sanctioned poetry reading in East Berlin. Up to this time readings have been only in private homes or within the sanctuary of churches, news of their occurrence being passed on by word of mouth. Tonight's reading is at the Kino Babylon, a movie theater not far from Alexanderplatz, and is sponsored by Aufbau Verlag, East Germany's government owned and operated press. All presses, all publications are government owned and operated in East Germany, though over the 1980s, a few samizdat-style magazines have arisen, printed in small editions where each page is either individually typed or a carbon copy, there being no general access to printing or photocopy machinery. I had resided in West Berlin from October of '85 through May of '86 (and over December of '86) and had over that time gone to a reading at an apartment in East Berlin's Prenzlauer Berg district to hear the poets Rainer Schedlinski, Eberhard Haefner and Jan Faktor. The poets read in a doorway so that the fifty some people crammed into the two adjacent rooms could hear. The audience listened with painstaking care and the discussion after the reading (which lasted fully as long as the reading) was intense, disagreements over methods and forms of writing being voiced with at times astonishing moral anger, the poets being called on to justify what they were writing, how they were writing it. The church reading I attended in East Berlin's Pankow

district was likewise packed to overflowing, though the somewhat more public occasion involved less overt discussion.

The Kino Babylon reading was one change over the two intervening years. Another was that more of the East German poets I knew were now granted visas to read in the West (some, who had more than a few readings scheduled in the West, retained visas which permitted them to cross the border at any time). Another was that those of us holding western passports could now cross to East Berlin at midnight on our one-day visas, rather than, as previously, only after 7:00 a.m. Even before the astounding events of this past summer and autumn (I write now in December of '89) changes were taking place in East Germany. Changes are now occurring there with such rapidity that it is vain to speculate on what the future will bring. I remained in Berlin through May of '89.

Though I've made this border crossing many times, it's always somewhat strange. And to come out of the Friedrichstrasse crossing into the streets of East Berlin is to enter a grey, sober, neonless place which feels as though one has passed through a time machine to an earlier epoch. Police watch-booths with tinted windows interrupt the sidewalks of Unter den Linden; virtually all the cars are the same GDR-made compact of a vaguely '50s design; by night, away from the downtown area, the streetlights are scarcely bright enough to read a map by. I get to Kino Babylon before 1:00 a.m., in time to hear a stage band play, to hear Stefan Döring read, to hear Bert Papenfuss-Gorek read accompanied by a group of classically-trained punk musicians called Die Verbrechern (The Criminals), as well as a few other poets. The event is festive and goes on until 4:00 a.m. As the management is trying to close, two men from the audience launch into this impromptu Brechtian agitprop dialogue which is deeply satirical, outrageously funny and occasionally acrobatic. They continue through the house lights being turned off. The crowd loves it.

My involvement with East German poetry stems from my getting to know a number of poets in East Berlin over the spring of 1986 whose work I found more interesting and vital than what I'd come across in West Berlin. My decision to translate their works stems both from a personal curiosity which visualizes translation as a coherent mode of reading and from a sense that the work of these poets merits exposure to our reading public. Sine that time I've gathered poems of some thirty East German poets whom I plan to publish in an anthology. The five poets whose work appears here are less members of any defined literary movement than they are representatives of a generation's vanguard. The oldest among them is thirty-five years old and they share a sense of working within a literary terrain whish is distinct from what has been called "the middle generation" of East German poets (those now in their fifties, foremost among whom are

Karl Mickel, Sara Kirsch, and Heinz Czechowski). There is a sense of moving away from the more classical intentions of that generation. Rainer Schedlinski (born in 1956), who edits the samizdat-style journal of theoretical writings, *ariadnefabrik,* states in a 1986 interview with Egmont Hesse: "Yes, particularly in these last few years in East Berlin poetry there's been a lot of experimentation toward thinking things anew, into another language. . .Papenfuss dismantles language into the smallest mnemonic unities which, mutually purged from the text, then permit a new arrangement. With Döring, digitalized, dialectical chain reactions occur by which one word destroys the one next to it. Koziol works with the mechanism of figurative language."

Over the 1980s these poets, along with others, published their poems largely in a few "underground" samizdat-style magazines, most notably, *Mikado* and *schaden* (which later became *verwendung).* 1985 saw the publication in West Germany of a sizable anthology of younger East German poets *(Berührung ist nur eine Randerscheinung,* Kiepenheuer & Witsch, Köln, Sascha Anderson & Elke Erb, eds.), and 1988 saw the publication, again in West Germany, of *Sprache & Antwort* (S. Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt, Egmont Hesse, ed.), which bears the subtitle "Voices and Texts of Another Literature from the GDR" and which contains poems and interviews from ten younger East German poets, among whom are the five I present here.

In speaking with East German poets about how their poetry functioned in their world, one of the things mentioned was that, on account of all media being controlled by the government, poetry, on one level, took on a function of conveying "the news," in a literal sense of communicating the facts of things that had happened. Another was a factor resulting from a long habituation to censorship: on one hand, certain things could be talked about only implication or calculated uses of *silence,* and on the other hand, a kind of inner self-censorship which becomes only half-conscious. Schedlinski speaks out against this in the same *Sprache & Antwort* interview I cited above:

> There is no discourse of transformation that does not leave off in order to define itself by way of immediate affirmation. It alienates itself. . .I mean that art has responsibility in face of those without speech, not to the required but to the existing opposite. It is not a matter of formulating the rupture, but rather of formulating the broken speech itself; not a matter of conversing with, but rather of articulating the silence, somewhat like the man who was passing out handbills and when the police arrested him and remarked that there was nothing written on the handbills so why was he distributing black

pages, he'd answered: so that everybody would know it." (In 1988 Aufbau Verlag published a book of Schedlinski's poems, *die rationen des ja un des nein.)*

The first time I visited Ulrich Zieger in his East Berlin apartment I noted the photograph of Ezra Pound, which was the single object to occupy one entire wall, as well as the sizable collection of rock-and-roll records. Although he couldn't really speak English, he could recite from memory sections of Pound's *Cantos*. A co-editor of *verwendung,* he was working in theaters as actor, stage manager, director. It was Zieger who conveyed to me early in '89 that the conservative position of their then current government was absurd and patently impractical, above all because of the upcoming 1992 EEC trading merger which would remove the West from East Germany as a marketplace for their industrial products. People, he said, had gone along with it out of habit, out of fear.

Events have since changed more rapidly than either of us could have foreseen. Zieger had for some years been working on a magnum opus cyclus of poems entitled "1965" which centers around the death, in that years, of a childhood friend (Zieger was then four years old). Echoing Pound, as well as Artaud and Bataille, the cyclus explores various typologies outwards from a childhood in a GDR country town. Having finished this project, Zieger, in April '89 while returning from a reading he gave in Munich (West Germany), stepped off the train in West Berlin and stayed. The move had been planned but had to be kept secret from the other GDR poets he traveled with to prevent their being implicated. It was really marvelous hanging out with Ulrich those first weeks he was in the West, witnessing his enthusiasm. There has been, in West Berlin, a sizable community of previous East Berliners. Rainer Schedlinski once lamented to me as we sat in a Schönhauser Alle cafe (East Berlin) which had been one of their literary hang-outs that he now had more of his friends in the West than here where we were.

Among his peers, Bert Papenfuss-Gorek is considered the most consistently innovative poet. A wry man who smiles easily, Papenfuss-Gorek has been working with rock bands over the recent years and has a long time engagement with Celtic mythology. Praised by Karl Mickel as a master of non-syntactical grammar, Papenfuss-Gorek writes verse which is often chaffing and sprinkled with neologisms (which are not uncommon in German poetry) and argot of various historical periods and languages. In 1988 his book, *dreizehntanz,* appeared from Aufbau Verlag with introductions by Karl Mickel and by Ernst Jandal. In regard to the ongoing cyclus entitled *TrakTat zum ABER*(portions of which are translated here), he says in a *Sprache & Antwort* interview with Egmont Hesse:

> I have always written additional texts to it and always strictly knew that these texts had to be in the treatise ("Traktat"), but see now for the first time, after four or five years of clarity, what these texts are for. These are texts which are insolent and for which a formal boundary is erected for the active expressing of feeling. Formally I proceed no further, and then there's a crossing over of a boundary, insolence or something of that sort: but which is not constructional but rather provocational, and which attempts, right up to that boundary, to enact a crossing of that same boundary, but that, however, is the termination, the closure.

Hesse asks him about political engagement. "It hasn't lessened," he replies, "but hasn't increased from what it was at the beginning, it's not a political poem in the sense that. . .the political poem comes to terms with some aspect of the social-political concern and sees, at first, only these concerns and establishes a relationship between the elements. For me, however, inner processes arise out of subjective concerns which are quashed somehow in the social processes and are turned back on the individual from the social-political power structure. For that reason, texts which are, on one hand, very subjective, are, on the other hand, engaged politically, [and] that engagement is naturally radical, it couldn't be any other way. . .that inclines everything toward making an extremely anarchistic impression, but. . .I don't think that I'm an anarchist in the ordinary sense. . ."

Stefan Döring was born in 1954 in Oranienburg and studied electronics in Dresden. He worked for a time as a developmental engineer in medical electronics, then came to East Berlin in 1980, where he has resided since. Aside from publication in the above mentioned *ariadnefabrik, schaden,* and the *Berührung*. . . and *Sprache & Antwort* anthologies, his poems have appeared in the *Luchterhand Yearbook of Poetry* which is published annually in West Germany. A kind, sometimes quiet man, Döring writes a verse which combines the dense impactedness of "cut-up" experimentations with the concreteness of psychological minimalism.

Andreas Koziol (born 1957), a co-editor of *verwendung,* is a soft-spoken somewhat hermetic man who works all night and sleeps during the day at the Prenzlauer Berg apartment that he shares with his wife and their pet rabbit. (All of these five poets, in fact, live in East Berlin's Prenzlauer Berg district, at least according to my most recent information, except, *now,* Zieger.) I passed a couple of extremely pleasant midnight-to-morning periods with Koziol there, drinking tea and talking. He had broken off a university program in theology in order to work more fully at writing. Leading a

somewhat monastic life in his chambers, he is the sort of person who is not comfortable in public places. "What is writing other than a balancing act on a rope which swings between seriousness and play? Would one actually write if one had something to say?" he asks in a *Sprache & Antwort* interview. His poetry and his thinking have their site within a playful seriousness and a serious playfulness. From within this world of blurring distinctions and tendrils of woven stratagem, he once proposed to me in all seriousness that I translate his poems "without contents." As a further example of a curious finesse in the simultaneity of satire and sobriety, I cite a later portion of Koziol's interview with Egmont Hesse:

> Now, where the question about the sense of poetry and why it registers as more obscure than its interpretation of life is situated on the razor's edge, it's completely up to each person to give a piece of their mind to the general tribal experience, or to what the sick in want of impersonal meaning are otherwise still deprived of. In regards to the dangers of obscuration I have to add that the imputed hail of ideologically compatible characteristics, which always meet so beautifully in the blackness, has fallen on me as from all clouds, leaving me to myself.

East Berlin, and all of East Germany, will now, of course, never be the same. I leave you with a quote from Rainer Schedlinski: "The person who knows how things will proceed from here is a person who is not completely informed. . ."

ADDENDUM:

Jürgen Habermas states, "Very rarely has the jubilation of a revolution become silent so quickly as in Germany after the 9th of November, 1989." This agrees with my own perception, though it was initially startling, when I returned to East Berlin in March of this year (1990), to ask these people, Well, what's been happening? What's the news? to be answered by, Not much, or, Things are pretty much the same in my own life.

One of the things I'd enjoyed about the DDR previously had been a certain shyness in the people. The kid I fell into talking with must have known I wasn't DDRian, I know he did, he later, after we got to know each other, wanted to buy a pack of Prince, which I was smoking, from me; this was on the train to Leipzig—my point is simply that it was radically apparent that I was from *elsewhere* and he made absolutely no issue about it, asked not one leading question which would expose a curiosity, simply

conversed within the conversational typologies of the moment; I took this to be a politeness and it flatters a certain imagination I have about peoples' possible humanness, as well as encourages my ease in intercoursing with persons to whose culture I am alien. This quality was still there after the *Mauereröffnung*, as with the elderly man who with his plump teen-age daughter shared our table at the *Venezia* on Schönhauser Allee and for whom we appeared, for the first forty-five minutes, to be invisible, then, when we began to speak, exhibited a similar "politeness," a similar unpresupposing geniality. We finally got round to asking him what he thought about the recent events in Berlin (particularly visible had been the thousands of DDRers coming to the city's west and going bananas over bananas, and all other forms of previously unobtainable commodities. He was visibly embarrassed for his country (wo)men and said he'd only been over *(drüben)* once over the five months since November 9 and that was to visit a museum in Dahlem which he'd particularly enjoyed visiting as a child. He had gone with his daughter, and, as she'd wanted to see Kleist's grave in Wahnsee, he'd gone along there with her as well.

The poetry Samisdats are finished. The opening up of the main stream press usurped their function—the weeklies can publish the same stuff cheaper and with wider distribution. The same thing has happened in Czechoslovakia, as Tomas Kafka explained to us regarding his *QASNAK* which will not likely see another issue. Koziol, Schedlinski, and Egmont Hesse have formed a new press which they've called Verlag Galrev, which is completing Koziol's *Bestiarium*, a series of portraits of figures in the DDR literary world. May 1990 saw the completion of the Egmont Hesse-edited *Solitüden* (edition qwert zui opü), a translation of Bob Kaufman's *Solitudes Crowded With Loneliness* by thirteen DDR poets, among whom are the seven I present here. Before last year the Egmont Hesses of East Germany could produce their Samisdat magazines only if the editions did not exceed 250 copies each. Even though they'd planned the Kaufman book to be hard bound (the project was generously funded by Christa Wolf) they still could only figure on making 250 copies without the likelihood of repercussions. Visualizing the thaw they went ahead and made 300 copies plus 100 author's copies. Hesse explained that, now, the production would be economically impossible: hand set, paper like I've never seen: overnight everything's become photo offset. Galrev has an office downtown; Schedlinski has a word processor and printer in his living room and drives a fat Japanese car; Papenfuss-Gorek went to Ireland for a month; Eberhard Häfner's wife, the painter Magdelena Häfner, had an exhibition in Paris and on the money from that she and Eberhard went to Scotland for six weeks. The poet Durs Grünbein described that the change first hit him as he was walking home from work one day and saw the election poster on his front door: BACK TO THE FUTURE.

The 18 March election was, of course, vividly manipulated by the DDR's economically more powerful brother, interlocked with many DDRians' "grass is always greener on the other. . ." sense, e.g. Western packaged foods, now available in East German stores at much higher prices than domestically made correlatives, far outsell what is basically the same hunk of chicken, the same slab of cheese. And I wonder what the *Mauereröffnung* represents a failure of. Of totalitarianism, in the anti-communist view of it, in any case, of the world civil war which began in 1917. Habermas, in the same writing I cited above (*Die nachholende Revolution*, edition suhrkamp, Frankfurt, March 1990), describes, adjacent this view, what he calls a *post-modern critique of reason* view, which witnesses the event as in that spirit of the French Revolution in which the masses rise up: they announce "the revolutionary breakdown of bureaucratic socialism, an extension of the Modern—the spirit of the occident hauls in the east." Habermas goes on to narrate the *liberal meaning* which sees state socialism as the last form of totalitarian dominion in Europe, thus the end of an epoch which began with fascism. In the view of the anti-communists, socialism was unhealthy from its inception. For the liberals, everything that was useful in socialism has been embodied in the social-democratic era. "Thus, with the liquidation of East European state socialism, have the sources from which the West European left gleaned its theoretical stimulus and its normative orientation likewise dried up? The disappointed Biermann, whose talent toward utopia is shrouded in melancholy these days, answers: 'Pass me the shovel. Let's bury the little carcass. Even Christ himself first had to be under the dirt for three days before he could pull his stunt: on to the Resurrection!' *(Die Zeit*, March 2, 1990)." (Habermas, *op. cit.* p. 188).

Wolf Biermann, who was expelled from the DDR in 1976 on account of the government-critical content of his poems and folk songs, emblemizes an important turning point in DDR literary history and it would be useful to briefly sketch that.

The first five years after World War II, East Germany made a new beginning under the "auspices" of anti-fascism. Thereafter, up to 1953, there was, we could say, a conscious attempt to manipulate culture by means of ideology. After Stalin's death, in '53, there was a period of general uncertainty which led, in the later part of that decade, to a decided attempt to overcome the gap which separated the writers from the workers. This "Bitterfeld Way" was largely unsuccessful (Christa Wolf's novel, *Divided Sky*, stems from the conflicts of this period). A relaxation of government stricture through the early and mid-sixties brought into pre-eminence those writers known as the "middle generation" (Sarah Kirsch, who also left when Biermann did, Volker Braun, Heiner Müller, Christa Wolf; an admirable presentation of the work of the poets of this generation appears in Michael Hamburger's 1970 *East German Poetry)*. The '70s were a time of searching

for new means of expression while some, particularly among the painters, remained within the social-moral consistency of social realism. Until the crackdown in 1976. Not too many years later saw another loosening up. If I may attempt to generalize very schematically about a complex culture by referring to another art form I will cite the 1983 comment: "Despite a recent tendency towards melancholy and mysticism, a new generation of rock artists is characterized by boldness, vitality, and wit." *(Rockszene DDR. Aspekte eine Massenkultur in Sozialismus.* Olaf Leitner. Reinbek. Rowahlt. 1983).

When I asked Jan Faktor for poems of his in 1986, he refused, saying he didn't believe that people in the United States could understand what they there were doing with their poetry (though he did later relent and sent a long Brechtian piece which Anselm Hollo translated and published in *Exquisite Corpse).*

Faktor's comment needs to be taken seriously. One American publisher I sent a sizable body of East German poetry to sent it back with a note saying that if this was what was happening in East German poetry it was cynical, negative and depressing. One major difference between this generation of DDR poets and the one immediately preceding it is that they grew up in a less strictured social topology and were thus permitted to occupy a range of subjectivity which it was not "politically correct" for the middle generation to do. Thus you will find poems (not in this selection!) about the meaningless of life, for example. Because we ourselves are, willy-nilly, arterial inheritors, or at least descendents of, that 1950s so-called Beat disaffection, (i.e. "The Many Loves of Dobbie Gillis") and have also lived for many decades with at least a "Cafe Society" version of popularized existentialism, the DDR voices which enhance these emotional terrains are not interesting to us. Likewise, the DDR poets have read with care many of America's best writers, and the influence shows. If it were only a matter of the juice one gets from popping the bubbles of a fake realism by some kind of negative transcendence ("the androgyne who hates the simulacrum/ Bob Dylan") the poetry would be *boring.*

The Biermann case is particularly revealing (of a general attitude in the middle generation) in that he *believed* in socialism. Biermann moved from Hamburg to East Berlin in the '50s in order to be there. During the time he was in prison before being "allowed" to go on the concert tour to the west, after which the gate was shut, his bootlegged poems and songs were read voraciously by his compatriots: his Brechtian critical edge was intolerable to the regime.

Brandenburger Tor becomes a symbolic gate between the east and the west (unless, of course, you go by way of the Pacific). And is also literally a gate. As Clayton Eshleman pointed out in his essay on Hungarian poetry *(Sulfur 22),* the life situation in the Eastern Block countries is so radically

different from what ours is "out here on the periphery" as Jim Morrison says, that it is likely that we are not equipped to effectively & coherently imagine what it is like. This is what Jan Faktor knew.

Translation is a problem and a distance. I have no Russian: I can imagine and feel but not really, words through words, or syntactically, *see* the presence of Klebnikov in Eberhard Häfner's verse. And, as Mitch Cohen has pointed out, the Bach-like intricacy of Döring's constructions do not lend themselves to the English language because the extreme alliteration cannot be maintained, multiple meanings and neologistics do not cross well, and all the words which in German begin with "ent-" (which Döring uses as a recurrent pedal point in the musicality of . . . *between haste and deceit)* can't be rescued.

It would be a vanity on my part if I didn't publish my thanks to Achim Schweikard, Mary Angeline, Scott Thompson, and Mitch Cohen, without whom none of this would have gotten off the ground.

Elke Erb is a powerhouse, an extremely genial woman, and an energetic communicator. The recent years have seen the publication of a large book of her Marina Tsvetaeva translations, accompanied by a 130 page commentary, of her translation of a 13th Century Romance from the Georgian (Georgian, although spoken in Georgia, which is in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, is a language whose most visible root is Arabic), of anthologies she's edited, of, most recently, her book, *Kastanienallee. Texte und Kommentare* (Aufbau Verlag, Berlin und Weimar, 1989). The latter is a series of poems written over the early 1980s which Erb wrote "commentaries" to over the late 1980s. "Warning," translated here, is from this book. It would appear that, in "Warning," Ms. Erb takes a position more or less the polar opposite of that of Mr. Gary Snyder in regards to relations between humans and animals (I am thinking of the lecture Snyder gave with James Hillman in 1982). Erb has been and continues to be radically supportive of the work of other poets; it was Elke who encouraged Stefan Döring to translate poems from the 19th Century Georgian, which currently occupies him.

Eberhard Häfner is not interested in the reunification because he never thought of himself as German. He comes from Thüringen, Erfurt, to name the Ort, and, as is known, Thüringen was stormed by Prussia in the later 19th Century and forced into a slave membership in Wilhelminian times. The language he first learned is likewise rather different; it's an offshoot of a Sachsen variant which permitted Eberhard, when he was a child and the American soldiers occupied his village, to understand everything they were saying. He explained to me how the Celts migrated north from the Danube basin because of a peculiar chemical reaction which occurred between their skin and salt in the air. Mr. Häfner has the extremely pleasing quality

of being able to rectify my slips of the tongue and mind (when I'm speaking German my non-memory will sometimes substitute one word for another word which does not apply to the given context) by etymological correspondences. I like to think of him as a "high stepper." Thüringen is renowned, historically and otherwise, for its toys and glassware. He believes, with Mayakovsky, that once he writes his poems they no longer belong to him.

RAINER SCHEDLINSKI

TWO POEMS

(Tr. from the German
by Roderick Iverson)

ordinary and unnoticed
like the walls of the school yard
the certainty rests
over the neighborhoods
& the eyes ingrown
in all first floor windows
the traps of silence, my friend

you travel wretched distances
someone has counted your steps in the snow
& this mute certainty
is mother & murderer to things
& all these mute enactments
are an extended past
are an extended eternity cult

& beneath the domes of nothingness
reigns the power of space
& it is the certainty of everything
being thoroughly established
my friend, the schizo/peacock's eye
gave to one site the name corner
heater or bermuda triangle

the hours
which a brain of sand counts
in the starved corners of devotion
the words are passing judgment
on your memory, things
speak
from the heavy coffins of emptiness
which are lodged among the ordinary
localities speak from the distance of an inner barrenness
like the persuasive moon of remembrance & of going blind
the images die away to symbols
on the flags of silent lands
in you, mon dieu
the streetcar enacts its absurd awkwardness
& the suave dogs of morning
return to their nation

ULRICH ZIEGER

TWO POEMS *from 1965*

(Tr. from the German
by Roderick Iverson)

(7)

that it not become free:
to hear and to breathe:
this is the tale of woe of the north
which has come out of the south
bits and bridles beneath the lattice weave
which a horse still had
most had a pale yellow, a dun
most still had a bird's nest

between ourselves we wore
our hair cropped close
for the sake of our shirt collars
when they'd been linen
our necks were similar
to the scale of the wounds
our feet revealed

that it not become free
for our sake
that it does not triumph
and just as the coming day
would gather in my comrade
so what we took for our mutually fragile
steady continuing
would not be put aside: we weren't released
beneath our toenails match stick
balls rolled from gooseberry leaves
for fear that the horses would bag us into tiredness

this is the tale of woe of the way
    lest it come over us
    soon after extinguishing the lodestars
    for us the stones always remained
he who went with us
named tender names:

white breads as they're baked around Easter
violins of the earth . . .
    o that no one would have risked it
    to glance up for a respite
    near the watering cans
    so to break off the laboriousness
of our remaining urgency:
voices of the middle cried out

    to breathe and to hear:
    on our necks the moon
and the gnawing entreaty to not now grow cold
to not endanger the night work
of navigation's black thoughts
    there: the play
    there: the fern is scorn
    and thus its speech
that not one rise to become free
that it would have seized hold of mother
and the secret decisions
sanatoriums adjacent the primary streaming

o we owed everything to you
you and the landscapes
which are spread out between the south and the north
their fadedness their still more faded lights:
    the right to a daily schnapps
    the conversation with the riders
    of death in the hour before the uprising
in addition to refilling your hands with sand
the maidens came at your bidding
into the washroom

that the anguish we've turned away from
doesn't ensnare you:
    that it not become free
    to have been able
    to embed itself in the mountain
    the branches were even more thickly
    acquiescent in this destitution
than had been suspected
the breathing and hearing subside and to hear and to breathe:

(18)

Measure's greater strictness
is only the day shift of the dead
more time consuming & thornier of fury
are the streets of he who drinks

else I wanted to have sung the runway
of your pirouette, of your return greyeyes
the throwing of stones the banner
of a comprisable building crystal

and my force field is nothing
but surgical dressing iodine iodizing
the guardian of the sung round
. . . ah

BERT PAPENFUSS-GOREK

THREE POEMS
and an excerpt from
ARIANRHOD FROM THE OVERDOSE

misfortunate am i, a ruffian
& anything but devoted
your wallpaper is mottled
& so your coming to terms
overshadows necessity
with the inevitable & with work
your malice is obstinate greed
my cock no board of directors
the proofs are stilettoes
pain's limit is past overdue
confidence is true to loveliness
the appointments can stay away
the moon nearly full, pants down
prostitution, depending on the torque, hard
thought's thanks is disgust, overpowering
curiosity is contemplating meat inspection
sects stink of safety
finally i want to end it
bite me off, bespectacled
sock it to me thick with rivets
in the sewer we're safe
from betrayal by perfect facts
poems that overflow with pride
changes that execute themselves
theme:
shops damaged & likewise the hatches
title:
sewage in my counter-presence

quietness that in scorn capsizes
friendship which lays itself aside
clod which, ploughed high, bails out
help which writes an article
shame which, having funds, withers away
suppose something comes to me
then results which pass by
prince of a fellow, clumsy slick dwarf
notice, that values itself
we've escaped the death threat
tell me, what's up with you
when your love's been interrupted
murders, that can be of service
we should've cut ourselves off from that
let greetings pass between us
cares, that care for each other
jealously, that troubles itself over us
come, ore, let yourself be smelted
I'll cover for you while you lie
informations, that inform themselves
I cannot name my name
questions, dull-headed & shrewd enough
to find out what preceded them
theme:
at least my life is a play on words
title:
turn it up & break it out

mary shelley, i love only you
& perhaps book blurbs also
superficially at the highest level

& my proficient elves naturally
my mother characteristically
my ex, in vain, even more
i'm only a clone of myself
& my love is not of this world
swollen face, fat thighs, etc.
pale cheeks, wet snatches, relatively
lascivious mouths, agile fingers
if i remember rightly
charms that led me further on
as I was always wanting out of myself
shitty bickering that tore me out
glory that didn't break loose
was the last thing that i wanted
death, always not quite lived out
precise embryologists my enemies
acrobats, better people, men
to be a man, friendly, beautiful & strong
austere, lax, astonished, bored
nevertheless, i am: self is but that
& in the little back room, mary, highest self
theme:
you always love the cat in the bag
title:
the wave's good will consists of froth

[Translated by Roderick Iverson]

from: *arianrhod from the overdose*

to spare me further torture, I will spare nothing
the time was in its time unleashed, something was building up
the light was grey, lightning blitzed, what sought itself, lost itself
inconsolation pronounced a toast, that hoped for change, soused
sinews bursting, hearts breaking, the young opposition shat itself
the underground went under, instead enough to go to ground
feely chatter roared in the broth, filthy blockage nipped the arse off
what was left to scrape together, ran dry, law and order reigned again
those discharged were captured, laws carried through
what arose was only refried grease, the bass and the pitch were missing
arianrhod raised an eyebrow and chop: seat and cunt began to itch
she bore something and ran away, I fell for her to befall
the time was in a trice spellbound, what waned, was powerless to pick up
& though the epic was underway, a poem was slotted in
to talk it away will be hard, but someone must really rip it open
because I don't love my audience, I'll take it on myself to take it on

before getting up comes no more winter

before us here the shit hits the fan
I'd really rather stay here
with my nearest fears
& fleeting longings
I have, which was difficult, thought out an error
first it goes to teasingly, & secondly
as you think with one fell swoop
(8.2. '88)
I had the feeling, that it snowed, because I slept

admitted, not my shallowest, but one, that hurts
& 'cos it's not deep enough, psychosomatic penalty hovers

mercy, arianrhod, by that which you love, I don't want to blackmail you, but
truly I wrote only for you, & already I brought down disaster
what I could have stopped happening, came to pass; 22 inmates kicked the bucket
they broke down on 8.2. '88, 5 past 8 in the attempt to underfly the storm '
bitchbride, you who raise your hackles, to give life, you take it nonetheless constantly
your dylan, who swam ahead, or lleu, whom you cursed threefold
or phil, who with the boozing at the same time also gave up life
mighty sister, for my sake I name your for your sake virgin
here is a further poem, to give you in appeasement a piece of my mind

on imperceptible guard

stand at the sea, stagnate; piss in it
disciplined and under surveillance
stirrings, that clean out
beachnazis, pissed

I love that maria
for whom it's worth it, to be ashamed
I say it in bad terms, I make no distinction
& all her schemeful forgeries for sure too, still

my social engagement screams, curls up and denies itself
aids here, gorbachev there, open my gob, out comes love
like it should too—, the skinheads on the other hand force me to think
I'd really like to go to football, to bucket down beer and mull it over
essential humanity is silent & sends nature packing
with or without, as far as possible without, shrieking, set phrases & padding
shout at each other shut, zeal pacifies patronage
I need one neither in the kisser, nor below the belt
as poem you can hardly call this at all

stefan döring would say, I stop short of the model-lyric
he has a good laugh, but what shall I kindle now
my social engagement screams, rejects, curls up and keeps silence
(9.2. '88)
a randy theme, hateful to me, pop, when you simplify
an idea full of mockery, that withers; I will not sign anything
it's hard enough for me, to issue my texts as my own
I have feelings, that make me sorry, hurt me deep to the core
cheat & shock in the bed of a bitch, illusion the only illumination
who wants to have to feel it, who empathizes freely with it
penny-dreadful blend of a tense peeping tom, who relaxes in spirit
strung in a cultural politics, that stands to attention, at the ready
arianrhod, I don't reproach you at all, but; my sweet little thing
I have tried here to write down, what they expect that way from
me:

[Translated by Karen Margolis]

STEFAN DORING

TWO POEMS

(Tr. from the German by Mitch Cohen and Roderick Iverson)

. . .BETWEEN HASTE AND DECEIT

the distances between us
null
& for no one to conquer
we've gone away for each other
the estrangements alongside us
transient
& for no one to cast off
we're bankrupt within each other
the falling away of boúndaries between us
sober
& by no one to be limited
we're beside ourselves with each other
the abstinence we have
capable
& to be arranged by no one
we've fallen back against each other
the experiences we have together
addictive
& dependent on no one
we're known from each other
the deprivations opposing us
proper
& to no avail
we're deceptive through each other
the expectations upon us
serious
& arbitrary
we're no difference to each other

the depreciations passing through us
chaste
& for no one
the disillusionments with ourselves
light
the disembodiment within us

SILENCE THE REST, AWAKENING

the noise numbs me, I fall asleep
impressions hollow me out, a stammering
ridicules, languishes with heeding mouth
what suits you comes across, incongruous
you see only what you savor, devoured
you add yourself to what contrives
abra your world collapses with you
all the world falls apart from each of us
the way you fleetingly tower up the wreckage
laying your little tower casually in ruins
you've ground your garbage to make your grist
the haughtiness and the highs of the moment
the way you fetter yourself, stilting proudly forward
before your eyes the goal of leaving something behind
staying, embodied, wilting substance
you repeat yourself, lose yourself
the festering and the delicacy of the moment.
but surely my overseer takes note of me
that I indenture myself properly
and not let fly our bird in the hand
our stinginess leaves no room for doubt
keeping on as though something would happen
seeking out our good-natured neighbors
who leave us be, receive, coming
to tell them how it would have been.

artifacts tease the objects too around us
one can look things almost in the eye
if we only stare at them steadily enough
we come as soon as truly to the point
to close, when then, from if to then
enclosing ourselves as wards in absurdity.
while we know that it's insoluble
do without it much mattering
wonder whether that's what it's coming to
that everything reduces to everything, no remainder
only silence the rest to the end awakening

ANDREAS KOZIOL

TWO POEMS

(Tr. from the German by Roderick Iverson)

UNTITLED

that which once again befalls the heavens, while you
smash up your most casual and liquid desires, he,

with a tinge of persecution mania, denies the perplexing
if not bizarre resemblance to your eyes, whether or not

we attain that castle in the air would be left undecided
because any reason for ascension at best undermines us

so we have the void beneath us like a free space that
fills itself superfluously, but only with materials

for departure. let us remain silent at the crest of our
displacements
and more than clearly leave them the foam on the outskirts of
our

feelings. already like an echo on the awkward stiffness
that follows contentiousness, roses blossom between my joints.

how's it going with the escapist impulses? so lala. bird in the
ha ha hand's the quotation of a set anxiety's span which will

leave you relieved if you join in undertaking what you stealthily
overstepped so as not to invade. from the start, emotional

betrayal belongs to confession, right next to tenderness,
converted (from conversation) into arrogance. though before

all things, wonder contains a measure of dismay. what remains
that is not comprehended turns out to be inclined to joke

within the so-called loss of face and is swallowed, rubbed off,
again, one on one. only you muse deathly pale on a solution like

it is in the book, to stuff the riddle into its coffin. who's
talking about mental victory? emergence is everything.

latest version: the predicament acts as a frame around an
emblem of the futility of drawing anything from poems

except for the death masks

THE ANGEL OF THE SITUATION

he crouches on the balls of his feet at the base
of an escalator that leads up to the museum of
Western-Eastern boredom. a book has grown from
his shoulder blades—the winds of all utopias
leaf through its pages. he himself cannot grasp
the text which he carries without reaching up
behind himself with his hands. from his finger-
nails burns the gas of dreams from a world which
his imagination no longer suppresses, a throng of
clouds that swarm up to the heaven of centralized
fictions. within himself he cries out from a thirst
for knowledge and from pain. the echo comes, a
childish report, through his rump and into the old
world, and, headed with musical brilliance toward

the sunlight, it blanches. its charm overpowers him
and he falls on his face, on that stamp which renders
speechless and impermissible the seed of his two-fold
sex. now he grounds himself in time's vicious circle
in order to eat from the foundation of his desire
for paradise which, following the formal laws of a
cannibalistic god, becomes visible with the appear-
ance of each stone which lies in his way to hinder him.

ELKE ERB

TEXT AND COMMENTARY

(Tr. from the German by Roderick Iverson)

WARNING

Murderer Master Suspicion
The enemy is outside
This Supremacy Masquerade
This Dictatorship

1978/82

Perhaps I succeed in it, in this text,

which seems to reject interpretation,
since, become shape, it stands there
like a red deer which has leapt from the forest,

which hasn't remained speech, which encloses speech in itself,
doesn't speak out from an unexpressed trace,
doesn't flare up towards speech with a resounding tone
of language, doesn't invite, remains for itself,

although, and precisely because of this,
its consistency is tangible
as that of direct speech,

in the way that someone speaks in thought,
speaks preceding themself, beyond themself,
pronounces to themself what passes through their mind,

begins with immediacy, proceeds logically,
and ends in the same manner,
a speaking very much to be taken as true
which completes something, clarifies something,
indicates a direction,

and its consistency is its clarity,
its train of thought which is untroubled
by objections, its immediacy, its unspoiled calm
its pure word, and the wording of its text
which in each aural intensity (each zone)
is open to quiet recitation.

To perceive it is to realize it,
and it is, moreover, all the same
whether one grasps the sense of it or not,
that to perceive its truth, clarity, immediacy,
calm, consistency, and shape
means to presuppose its causes as groundwork.

Since it affects me as a shape
so embodied and present,
I suppose, being entangled
in its perception, that I am
obliterating it when I apply myself
to its causes, as if it could
begrudge a dissecting of its groundwork;

I mean, to have to interpret it,
to have to graft dictums on to the silence of it
when I—interpret its groundwork:
and thus I instigate a two-fold confusion;

it's certain that I depart from its perception
if I am perceiving something else,
but why do I presume that that would be its interpretation?
and how is it that I so naively assume
that to interpret would be to analyze and vice versa,
and that both of these activities might be devastating?

—Along the course which this clarification has now taken
what I wanted to present
was really only the embarrassment of the commentator
in face of the text,

to say
that that would be no more than decent,

and thus to protest
against that whirling assertion which shrinks

from no repetition

that a poem would be finally or generally inaccessible
(aha! the clattering of "Unauthorized Personnel"
between *finally* and *generally*
—and did they come by bus, by car, or in a tank?),

on account of its presumed irrationality —

an assertion which either promotes the poem
as a beatific presence to be enshrined
(in reality, however, this alienates
the poem—of all things!—from the human);

or else excludes the understanding,
as if understanding weren't human,

and with this operation degrades the human
to the level of a destructive predatory animal
that conceals its own act of thievery (the Bank!)
and mirrors its own kept-in-reserve soul

in the feigned self-robbery of the poem,

which the predatory animal opportunely, snarling,
or, yes, sated, alludes to as encoding.

I wanted to say,
before my train of thought carried me off
(and all these concerns dissolved into thin air like
phantoms):
It's mere decency
when a person is fearful,
if not somewhat in awe of what's referred to
as the Actualization of the Creative.

And with my introductory "Perhaps I succeed in it"
I wanted to enter into the attempt
to simultaneously perceive the poem
and take its non-poem, its origin,
and its design into consideration:

Murderer Master Suspicion
The enemy is not outside
The enemy is none other
than your racapity (crossed out)
Not the secondhand depravity
not what makes things unrecognizable
not this Masquerade Supremacy
your predator breath (last three lines
crossed out together)
not this Supremacy Masquerade
this dictatorship of misfortune
not the lie, not the bicycle, not the beating heart (inserted
not anybody, not the line)

The enemy is none other
than your rapacity
One day it will come to light
You have always been the secret Master,
the actual Murderer,
your miserable greed (crossed out)
chased by fear, your poor repressed
never-satisfied greed, this betrayed nun, one day
it will come to light

Then I'll shit on everything that makes you cry,
because you're gorging yourself.

What did I have against this text?
I recall there was a time I woke full of rage and wrote something down—was it that?—
and, in the writing, held on to my (so painfully recalled) youthful outbursts of rage ("You slimy toad!", etc.),
and when I was finished (first appeasement)
I thought, still inside this resounding painfulness
which was like being inside a gonging bell:

It's good
that this impetuous, bloodless, defenseless
(forsaken by God and by all good spirits)
time can come to you again (second appeasement).

And I considered it and felt:
I still need a few more years, then I can
give the word to their curses and let them speak like this,
that an accomplished humanity might bear
this—sanguinary—speech (third appeasement).

I fell asleep again. The piece of paper got lost,
the strange event took longer to slip away,
then I found the piece of paper and reduced its inventory
to the four lines.

What I cancelled out automatically healed the rupture:
I wrangle on paper with someone who wrangles.

Ruptureless remnant:
I on paper with someone who.

The heading WARNING,
as well as the decision about altering the second line,

still state in one—joint—dare:

You can stick that on the mirror,
you can well see for yourself
whether that's the way you are
(to what extent the enemy for you is outside),
and you can see who you are.

To say it amicably: See for yourself—this Dictatorship
of a Supremacy Masquerade!

The impulses which remained on that piece of paper,
like the—kindly—foresight: I still need a few more years!,

have—as life goes—more or less fulfilled themselves,
or more or less not.

Life: an obstruction guards it against a blossoming
to which it has not ripened.

EBERHARD HAFNER

TOPLESS IS ALLOWED HERE

(Tr. from the German
by Roderick Iverson)

so i've got it & would like all three
states upright for my coffee along side that
& that would have
left it up to me to draw it all together
or graphically clear to write explicit jeer
to scoff off the last customers & instantly
pocket the handkerchief & push Tempo with a bad
tasting toothbrush on along on the machine-readable
as always quick on the tinge of lift off feeling initially
first degree navigation lights burning upper respiratory
on the contrary
it really swarms the planet off and running
so I must say I do declare
but I say a bottle of white dry if possible
right up to overflowing without getting wet else
we'll turn a perfectly fine parlor into a derelict stall
good morning berlin in battered pumps

could be kissed by the wind or bring actual tape worms
figuring without host sense: you see tomcat topples
kittycat
else mango kiwi pistachio don't lean out
hard pith of dissected art of reading & nerves
in verse i trace resin becoming bark
during a transaction (he) stood his olive violin warble
thundering after-clang in bare feet we enact beauty street
& other avenues rapped curt brusque under & so on
came a typewriter on quanto berlin from above
but from beneath stalagmite city

when raspberry ice streaks the earlyesque curtain
a light breeze crystallizes epidermis salt
spans the crossbow meadow & cracks codes in a city like this
swans boat around to drag me off from the retina
mirrored brazilian the pulverized
sleep or material for big hits out there
burning princely & lukewarm after a charred night
sweet & types link right in with the entire machine
i say good day

silhouettes & leafscapes greening to the windward
of a Wilhelminian shore to see another square
cartridges in carrots move along non-stop
separating yolks rejected on the close body
condolences my hexed heart at the pinnacle of summer
surrounding precinct of beloved mustard & tricks
what must out but where to
when it flakes off & the lighter radios to the eardrum
who's gone & hung out of the sauce & into the trough
always running on what's up with the eyelash
thought covered against lightning you're strawberried
what for one's the Alex for another's the rumper
through & through in the context

when the all & every spins around a wave thy will be done
as far as what nitty strife concerned outwards or obviously
I've lagged behind you & have been called
one of those kind
having passed into pluralities as though it were to have been
yesterday
& you can taken me on board all the time
everything's globally nailed & a Pomeranian
splits open the thread by which he hangs
doesn't burn by touching

MARJORIE WELISH

BODY'S SURPLUS: THE ART OF DAVID REED

A living figure, grown
Largest wherever rock has grown most small.
Just so, sometimes, good actions
For the trembling soul
Are hidden by its own body's surplus, . . .
—Michelangelo

What if a brush dragged along canvas to be lifted once the load of paint had exhausted itself, became unstoppable? And what if in its wake, an ever-renewing ribbon swirling across space, compounded by standing waves of another, superimposed, ribbon of paint, spread out? What if, in other words, in place of the natural material constraints of the brush there appeared licentious limitlessness?

This is exactly what has happened to the art of David Reed, or, rather, what Reed has allowed himself. After a decade of lean painting, in a practice that emulated the profound and reductive approaches of Robert Ryman, in the early 1980s Reed underwent an aesthetic conversion to "fat" matter and process; rich and hyperbolic, his once procedurally driven painting is entirely recast.

Reed's early brushstrokes displayed their material integrity. In that the physical nature of paint deposited through a single brushstroke was exactly commensurate with the meaning of this brushstroke, the act of painting bore a decided iconic relation to itself. The origin of the stroke coincided with the initial contact of brush to canvas, the coagulated red or green of that contact remaining as it was set down, intact. To follow the course of the brushstroke, to watch the paint draining through bristles, was, of course, to apprehend the phenomenon of beginnings, middles and ends in physical self-sufficiency. The brushstroke, then, spelled out the mechanics of the nature of liquidity.

The immediate context for this approach to paint was the transition from Minimalism of gestalt to minimalism of procedure. The simple, deliberate, repetitive laying down of one brushstroke after another in the manner of

Ryman's covering a small unprimed canvas laterally in white, the brush entirely instrumental in governing the unit of paint laid down, or of Carl Andre's placing side by side on the floor copper squares to form a grid, or of Jackie Winsor's hammering nails into a wooden beam to exhibit the studded results—these workman-like actions superseded "action" painting in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and David Reed participated in this concrete aesthetic wherein materials and procedures of making were launched.

Compared with this severe self-evidence of materials, Reed's recent paintings indulge a theatrical sleight-of-hand. Here is a thoroughgoing change from an aesthetic of the quotidian to an aesthetic of spectacle. As before, Reed's preference is for supports of extreme proportions, but now these wide, narrow canvases serve to crop a field of compound painterliness rather than to provide a neutrally appropriate frame for the exhibition of a brushstroke. Although gesture is uniform, scale is made strange through montage of rhythm and hue. In *No. 229* (1986), for instance, a kind of salmon bisque strip in regular folds interrupts an indigo-into-black field set flashing by a pale citron corner. In *No. 275* (1989), a spatula swept through alkyd pigment, working wet-in-wet, swirling gold through black, provides a writhing ground for a similar sweep in chartreuse, which, in turn, provides a platform for a single yellow brushstroke.

Like baroque drapery animated yet suspended in a kind of lethargic excitement of momentous occasion, Reed's brushstrokes half enact, half depict the action they are meant to display. This calligraphic taffeta introduces a complexity of rhetoric—more accurately a conflation of rhetoric—that Reed hadn't risked before. The modernist loyalty to the medium and the specific adherence to the brushstroke as self-sufficient are here combined with a post-modern historicism of style.

Reed is, moreover, studiously working out a vocabulary of illogicality that might organically proceed from the self-conscious attention paid to the painterly brushstroke. That is why his art seems to expand on the integrity of the brushstroke even as hyperbolic illusionism achieved by wielding spatulas could be said to be in patent violation of this integrity. The perfect vehicle for extending the materiality of the brushwork beyond its functional clothing of torso and limbs, drapery—especially according to the conventions of the Baroque—enacts a flight into emotional life independent of the figure swathed in it. Whereas in the Renaissance Gabriel's clothing, rushing upward in a wake behind the descending messenger, enacts the excited urgency of Mary's pregnancy and fate, in the Baroque cloth itself is impregnated with vitality and heft. Drapery bulks out; it materializes space. Reed's canvases have taken all this into account. His currently fleshed-out strokes, mediating between the calligraphic brush to which Abstract

Expressionism has accustomed us and Baroque drapery's palpable yet arbitrarily animated exuberance, create a disembodied embodiment of this stuff. The substantial transparency of his pigment play up the paradoxes, furthermore, of this sliding scale of stylistic referentiality. Although Michelangelesque theory viewed painting as additive while sculptural carving by nature subtractive, Reed has sought to create an effect of subtractive painting of brilliant strokes "carved" away by the dark ground. The individuality of Reed's painting, then, lies in his reinterpreting the New York School's formalism as a species of baroque action at once overextended and undercut.

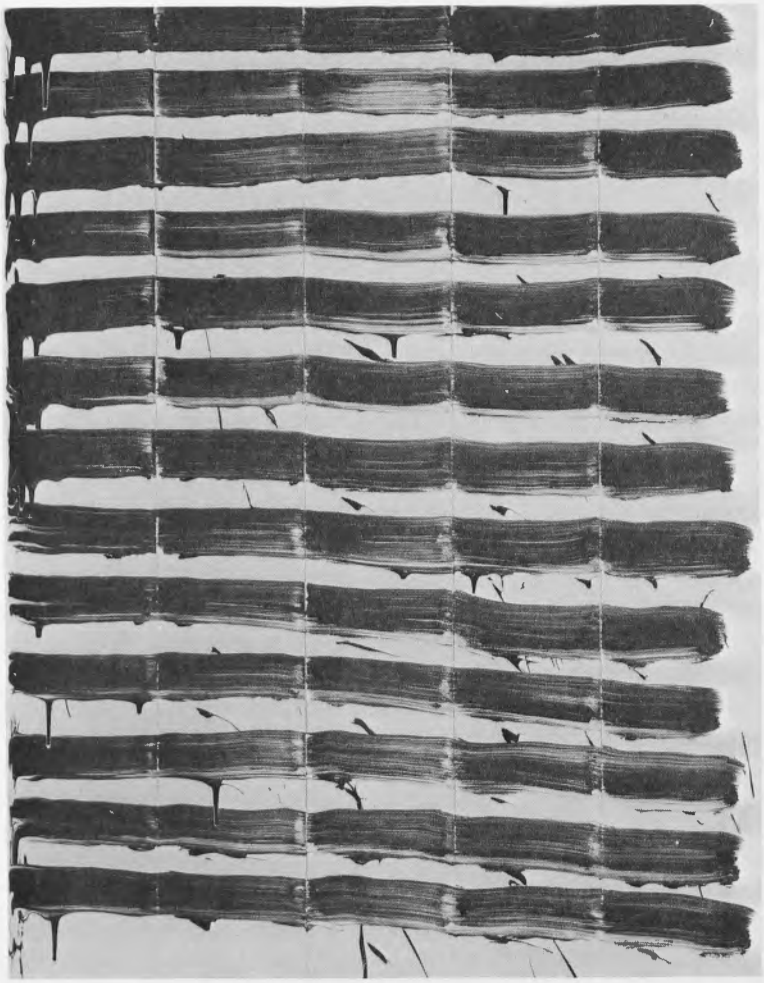
Like Frank Stella yet independent of him, Reed finds the Italian Baroque painters inspiring in their energetic piling up of forms in space. In The Norton Lectures given at Harvard in 1983-84, Stella flaunted his recently acquired enthusiasm for Caravaggio's deep space, which helped him justify his own extravagant decorative overload in his current relief paintings. Proceeding progressively from the interlace of complex virtual space to the constructed relief incorporating actual space, Stella has hoped to install a logic of decoration by which to retain his position as a modernist, and to the extent that his art is a strategy of the decorative, he may indeed succeed. Retaining reference to actual brushstroke in his current opera of illusionism has enabled Reed, meanwhile, to locate a more convincing way of justifying his embrace of a set of terms apparently antithetical to the straitened formalist vernacular from which his generation emerged.

Once when Reed and I were in Soho looking at gallery shows, we stopped at the Paula Cooper gallery, which then had on view small —and compressed—polychrome constructivist reliefs. Reed, containing his distress, asked, "Do they seem to you arbitrary or inevitable?" "Both," I said. Since then, Reed's own art has welcomed into its domain the principle of arbitrariness. But at the same time, the cohesiveness governing the principle by which the brushstroke assumes its historicizing mantle seems inevitable as well.

DAVID REED

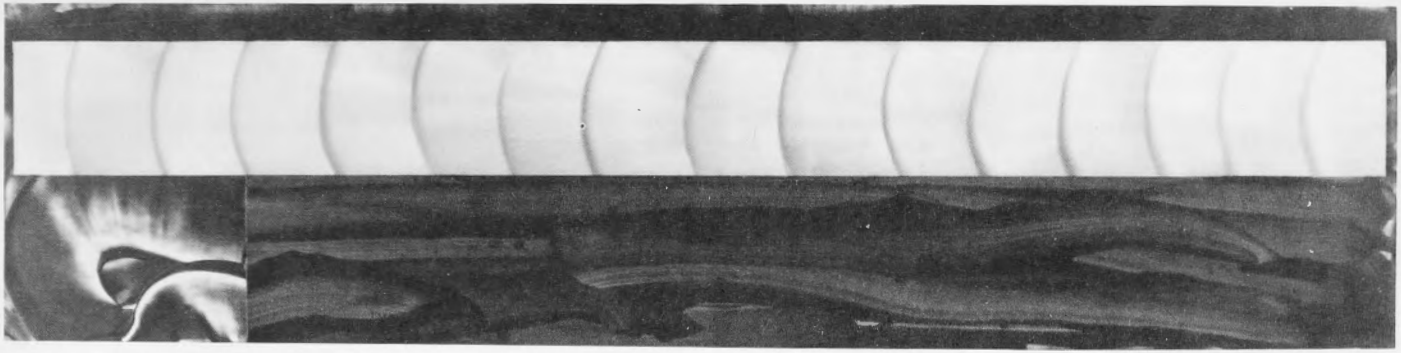
FIVE PAINTINGS

(Photographed by Dennis Cowley)



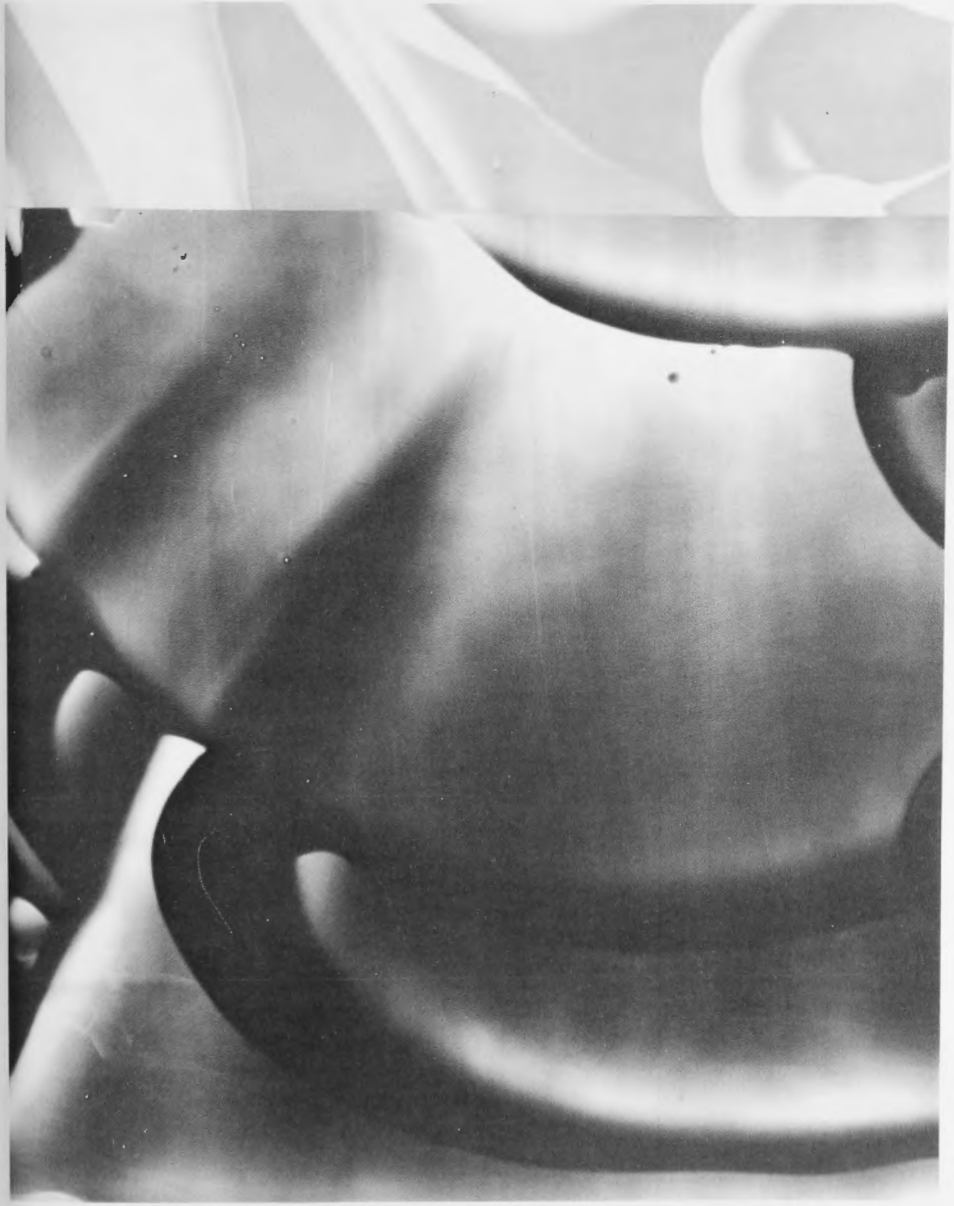
#73

1975, Oil on Canvas (5 canvases bolted together), 76" x 44"



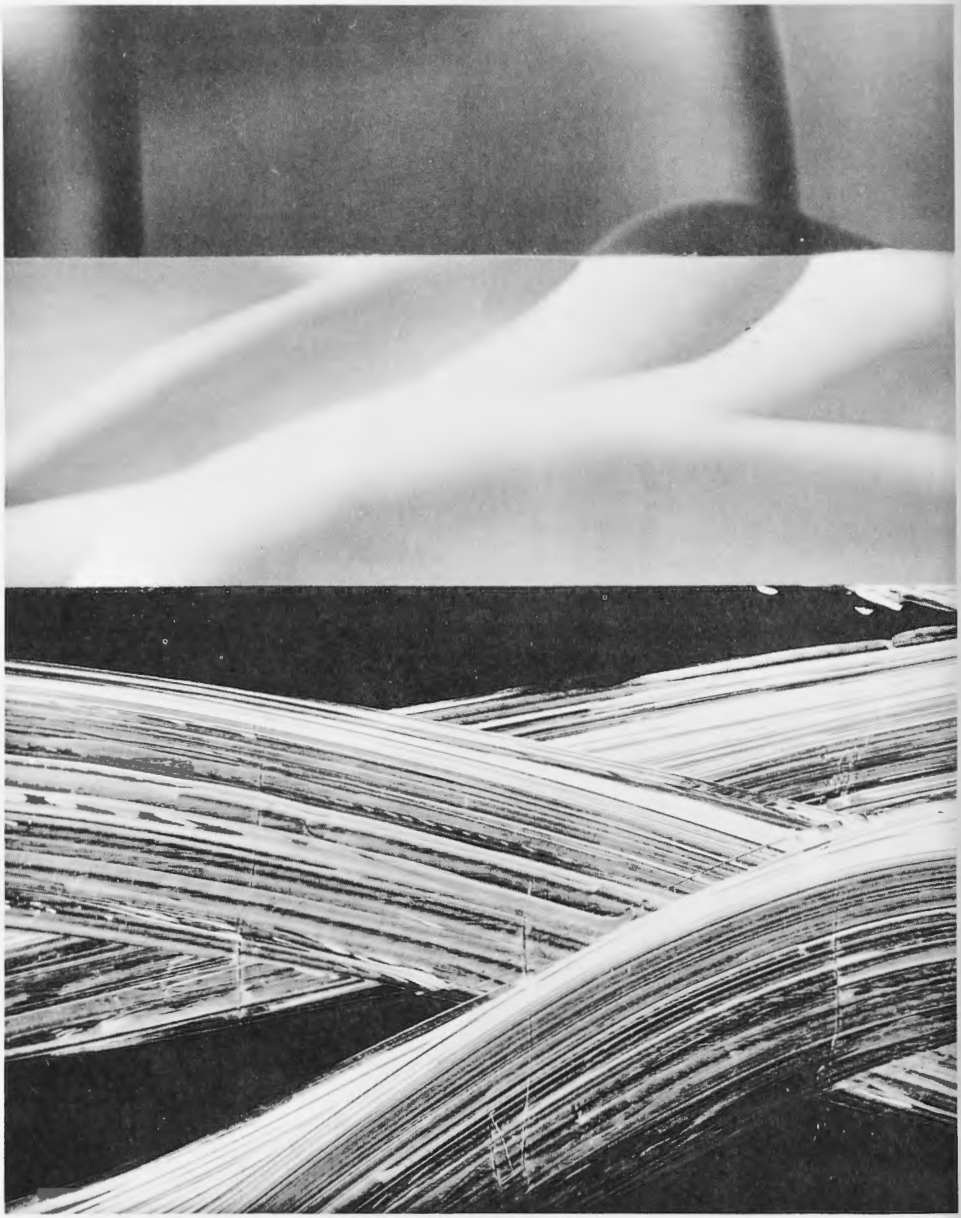
#229/ 1986, Oil on Canvas with Alkyd, 25" x 100"

#276 / 1989, Oil and Alkyd on Linen, 24" x 102"



#275 (detail)

1989, Oil and Alkyd on Linen, 26" x 102"



#275 (detail)

ALLEN S. WEISS

INDICATIVES: INTRODUCTION TO VALERE NOVARINA'S "IMPERATIVES"

It is perhaps not unusual for a man of the theater—"The Man of Valère" as Valère Novarina refers to his own persona, who appears in his theatrical pieces—to declaim that "The theater is a rich dungheap."* Yet his is a theatrical practice that leads us directly into that morass of the body, ultimately indistinguishable from the extreme possibilities of language itself:

> Mouth, anus. Sphincters. Round muscles closing our holes. The opening and the closing of the word. Attack cleanly (teeth, lips, muscled mouth) and finish cleanly (cut off the air). Stop cleanly. Chew and eat the text. A blind spectator should be able to hear it crunched and swallowed, to ask himself what is being eaten over there, on stage. What are they eating? They're eating themselves? Chewing or swallowing. Mastication, sucking, swallowing. Pieces of the text must be bitten off, viciously attacked by the female eaters (lips, teeth); other pieces must be quickly gulped down, swallowed, gobbled up, breathed in, guzzled. Eat, gulp, eat, chew, dry lung, chew, masticate, cannibal! (9-10)

This new method of acting reveals the corporeal limits of the French language, far from the standard French of contemporary media. Novarina's critique of the uniformization, the cleanliness, the blandness of mediatized French is based on the fact that radio brings its technical capabilities to bear on dis-simulating the body.

> They work night and day with immense teams and enormous financial means: a cleansing of the body in sound recording, a toilet of the voice, filtering, tapes edited and carefully purified of all laughs, farts, hiccoughs, salivations, respirations,

> of all the slag that marks our animal, material nature of this word that comes from the human body. . . (17)

As his theatrical project—the thrust of this new manifesto of a corporeal theater—Novarina demands, in the imperative mood, "Articulatory cruelty, linguistic carnage (11)." Who are his precursors in this carnal quest, this disruption of the French language, this reconciliation of word and body? Rabelais (for the sheer inventiveness of his language, and his carnivalesque upheavals of cultural values); Alfred Jarry (for the hyperbolic derision, cynicism and farce of his pataphysical theater); Artaud (not only in his theory and practice of a "theater of cruelty," but perhaps even more so through the linguistic madness of the *Cahiers de Rodez,* those notebooks kept during his incarceration in a psychiatric hospital, and also in the final works accomplished upon his return to Paris just before his death, such as *Artaud le mômo, Ci-gît, Suppôts et suppliciations,* and *Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu);* Jean Dubuffet (through his search for the diverse excesses of a *langage brut,* enunciations no longer dissociated from our corporeal functions, nor from our libidinal impulses); and perhaps Gustave Flaubert (whose *La tentation de Saint Antoine* provides certain formal inventions of both scenario and dialogue).

As concrete advice for his actors, he demands that they rewrite the text with their bodies, that they "see that it is not a text but a body that moves, breathes, has erections, sweats, exits, gets worn out (20)." In this desublimatory theater, Novarina inaugurates a return of the repressed body. The cultural will to repress its corporeal origins—that irony at the root of sublimation—is here contested by a radically incoherent, yet absolutely creative, system of linguistic transformations, metamorphoses, substitutions and transfigurations which effectively contest the symbolic cultural law. In *Le drame de la vie,* he achieves this in a manner analogous to that of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake.* Instead of "riverrun, past Eve and Adam's. . .," Novarina begins the Prologue:

> The theater is empty. Adam enters.
> Adam—How does it happen that one speaks? Let the meat express itself?
> He leaves. There enters The Man of Pontalambin, The Man of Lambi, John Membret, Sapolin, The Man of Saporleolimasse, Bandru, The Man of Pontagre, Bomberre, The Man of the Host. . .

plus over 220 other characters—including John the Hole who Verbs, John the Gas, The Venereal Man, Homo Automaticus, Omo Onomaticus, John Meat, Zipper, the Deaf One, John Cadaver, Iambic Hole, Gallus, the

Swine—many of whom will be given voice but once. The first to speak is The Dog: "Man is not born." Three hundred pages later, Adam enters again, and recites the litany of all those names which preceded him: 2,587 names! This enumeration, this incantation, ends with the name of Adam, the last word of the book. Here is the drama of life: Adam's phantasy in the form of a biblical litany of names where each one speaks; The Man of Valère's phantasy, expressed in a pure form of nomination, where the flesh, the meat, verbalizes; our phantasies, inscribed within each reading of the text, by each mouth-hole that pronounces the words. Among these names we find The Man of Valère. We also find Voice Of. Yet somehow, curiously, we never find our own *nom de théâtre.*

*Valère Novarina, "Lettre aux acteurs," in *Le théâtre des paroles* (Paris, P.O.L., 1989), p. 15. This open letter was written as the instructions for the troupe that performed *L'Atelier volant* in January 1974. (All citations are from this text; page numbers appear in parentheses; all translations are my own, including those of the names cited.)

VALERE NOVARINA

IMPERATIVES*

(Tr. from the French
by Allen S. Weiss)

I—Staffs of knowledge, questions-answers, characters two by two.
II—The story of each name. 2,587 names. Tell the story of each name.
III—And this one? And this one? And this one? And this one?
IV—Always try to provoke the emission of thought. Reconstitute the history of thought from these remains of language.
V—Like so many bodies, like so many languages, like so many scenes brought to an end, like so many scenes brought to their end, like so many brutal dramas.
VI—At the center of each scene, his name which would return.
VII—I have lived through states of departure from man, I have left and returned to man, I have entered and left a man.
VIII—The drama of the scene.
IX—It is the moment when neither the physical world, nor man's place within it, is any longer stable in languages.
X—Tiered language, in several speeds. With all the characters inverted.
XI—Surpass the prohibition, do the thing unbridled.
XII—Mutant. To be continued at the end of time. To be continued in life. Anti-physical action.
XIII—Title: The Week.
XIV—The story of a descent. Make man *[l'hôm]* ascend again.
XV—The history of languages; make man rise up again to the things, the animals, the elements, the mixtures, the animals.
XVI—Biological adventures, mutation, acquisition, loss of members, changes of function.
XVII—Practice the worst.
XVIII—Emission of opinions from the mouth of nobody.
XIX—A neological name for each phenomenon.
XX—Use what comes.
XXI—The body is an earth, my ground which collapses, the end of biological certitudes.

XXII—A list of monsters, mutants, mutes, a list of all people, a list of all men made of something other than man, in matter other than flesh and blood. A list of men made of spirit.
XXIII—Practice biological interrogation, the hole of death and the hole of life.
XXIV—Saw endless violence. To each his adventure.
XXV—The I is in italics.
XXVI—Question the mysteries of biological economy, list them.
XXVII—The end of the world perhaps having already taken place, the history of the separation of men and women. The multiplication of their names.
XXVIII—Make the names exist rapidly, like drawings. The action of names. Dislodge the names from the world.
XXIX—Diverse postures of coupling, bodies two by two, Siameseries, monstrosities, fatal postures and poses, litanies, processions, bas reliefs.
XXX—Say how *X* died and was born, with nothing in between. Story of the man who.
XXXI—One thousand nine hundred forty-two, one thousand nine hundred forty-three, one thousand nine hundred forty-four, I am four years old, I am eight years old, I am twenty-four years old.
XXXII—The nine ways to die, to reproduce.
XXXIII—The old idea of the diary within.
XXXIV—Towards one view, towards no view.
XXXV—Each scene in itself, each thunderbolt in itself. Flee every total vision.
XXXVI—Return to the great pneumatic writing.
XXXVII—Genetic genesis. The Man of. . . the Man of. . .
XXXVIII—The appearance and the disappearance of man by man.
XXXIX—Comic. Image from the depths of the melodrome, never stated.
XL—What is important is not the work upon language, but the vision, the visitation.
XLI—The dance of the victims.
XLII—Hominet of Pontal, Napoléomifère, the Homifères.
XLIII—The history of God and his comedy.
XLIV—Must finish with a stroke of the baton at the end.
XLV—A crime for each episode.
XLVI—No longer on the hapax but on the refrain, on the so very painful return to our language.
XLVII—Record of the action, bomb of the action.
XLVIII—Obsequies, scenes, banquets, races, parades, assumptions of power, executions, weddings, charivari, anthropophagies, meal of sounds.
XLIX—The theater of time.
L—Very comical and very holy.

LI—In each scene its coupling, in each one its coupling and its crime.
LII—The man for whom it is more and more difficult to bear his own name.
LIII—Everyone will be given life in three lines.
LIV—Separate the women from the rest.
LV—The names of presidents and ministers, the list of times and departments, litanies.
LVI—The character's difficulty in seeing himself.
LVII—Recite thought's incapacity. Bring your incomprehension of all language, of all thought, to its conclusion!
LVIII—A reflection of Valère in each scene, like the painter in the painting.
LIX—Exceed the prohibitions. Antiphysical adventures.
LX—The story of a descent from which man will be made to rise again.
LXI—A picture of endless violence, a view of endless violence, in a more or less disordered language.
LXII—Born from a name, born from his name.
LXIII—From May 4, 1942, until today, I witnessed the drama of life. Here are the words. . .
LXIV—Animal monsters within, animal monsters with, inside, the passage of man, the repetition, the reproduction, the question of man.
LXV—I am in the man. To be able to say that.
LXVI—Do re mi fa so, the old idea of sewing, of weaving do re mi fa so.
LXVII—Fuckists, footists, verifiers, remainder buyers, axiomaticians, paraphrenians, orléophones, concomixers: a zoological list of jobs.
LXVIII—Capture of the breath, capture of the voice.
LXIX—Say the places, the dates, the jobs.
LXX—Tale of your thirteen thousand days, sum of your days.
LXXI—The factory Moda, the manufacturing plant Kuhlman, Lake Ludan, Goinfres Hospital. A list of places.
LXXII—I enter into nothing.
LXXIII—We have totally lost our real.
LXXIV—Videation of *X*, dormification of *Y*.
LXXV—A list of tools, of orchestras, of dances.
LXXVI—Acquisition and loss of new members, of new functions.
LXXVII—Eat the ledorimat, suffer the gemel.
LXXVIII—The macabiat, the viandat, the chutat, the exidon, the parlement, the jambaison, the anonition: a state by thunderbolts, a state by day.
LXXIX—Valère falls in viandat, Valère falls in anonition.
LXXX—Exit. Held by the sufferings of languages, by the suffering of being.
LXXXI—Leave traces of unresolved struggles.
LXXXII—Descent to the sounds.
LXXXIII—The old idea of the unwound thread.
LXXXIV—To figure, to make the action happen. The reality principle.
LXXXV—Make the file of names.

LXXXVI—No longer on the tongue but in thought! Like meaning rising from an initial strangulation. The prohibition is now in thought, no longer in language. Thrust forth as far as the stage, as far as thought.
LXXXVII—Also give names to women.
LXXXVIII—Make the money circulate.
LXXXIX—The day when I am dead, I must say all.
XC—A procedure which consists in displacing the things which obstruct you, in inverting, in grasping them inside out. The reversal liberates you.
XCI—You must no longer speak the language of this world.
XCII—The figures not of a tale but of shattered words.
XCIII—Everything turns around a scene that cannot be described.
XCIV—Recopy the sleep, leave things in summary.
XCV—Leave cruelly, go to the end of the jolts.
XCVI—A thousand thunderbolts.
XCVII—Finale: here ends the drama of life.
XCVIII—Forty years, forty chapters, forty days.
XCIX—Tell of your years, the stream of time that bears you off.
C—Who watched who sold who built who invented who demolished who passed who telephoned who raised who lowered who prolonged who apostrophised who hoped who replaced, a litany of verbs.
CI—Variations of the tenses and the verbs of rejoinders.
CII—Cause to leave the scene, clause *one* to leave the stage.
CIII—Capture of the breath. Each thunderbolt like a sermon, up until the denouement of the void.
CIV—The relief would arise from what each would speak in his language.
CV—On the cycle, the returns, the repetitions.
CVI—Voyage to the loss of language.
CVII—The misfortune of making the first novel without men.
CVIII—It is by reinjecting each subject within that you will find sight once again.
CIX—A violence which you shall never fear: all this has meaning only when pushed very far, to the end.
CX—Action reduced to nomination, action seen from within.
CXI—Scenery instructions have only a rhythmic function.
CXII—Practice the worst and go farther than the stupid depth, strive towards the beast of joy.
CXIII—You must use whatever happens to you.
CXIV—The old idea of schizogenesis. Know how to organize its growths.
CXV—The animal of time: one thousand nine hundred forty-three, eight.
CXVI—The suns.
CXVII—The Mélodier Fusargue, The Constant Mélodier.
CXVIII—Verify the scene of God and say it again.

CXIX—Will there be litanies of destruction in the litanies? Destroyed landscapes, knell of all the places on earth.
CXX—Write: Lif. *[La vi]*
CXXI—Respiratory theatricality of the page.
CXXII—A count of characters, the work of numbers. Action reduced to nomination, action seen from within. Not only for the ear, but also for the mind. The necessity of a very rigorous circulatory economy of names.
CXXIII—Make a list of notions, of animals, of jobs, of places, of machines, of names.
CXXIV—Respiration, walks, reading, music, morning exercises. Do it every day. Truly try to have a respiratory, corporeal practice. Before beginning, place oneself in a productive posture, in a mental posture of writing. Always prepare oneself by the void.
CXXV—The duration of the sessions: four hours. Without counting the time of preparation, of practice, of a spiritual and physical getting under way. Duration of the acts: forty days. Examine and follow the natural timetable. Organize the impulses, frame them, date them and program them.
CXXVI—Practice in the least amnesiac manner. Never strike with the imprecise, the unbreathed, the unpunctuated. Spend each day typing, but first write by hand, with several different inks.
CXXVII—You are several.
CXXVIII—Date the sessions. Session of such and such a date. Session of time. The unity is the session, not the scene. Divided into forty sessions, forty thunderbolts.
CXXIX—The story of a man who had more and more difficulties with his own mind.
CXXX—The old idea of schizogenesis: everything two by two, everything divided. Weaving of echoes, recto-verso. Resolve the problem of return mechanically, not within thought. A mechanism must free you from it. You practice neither writing, nor thought, but division.
CXXXI—Divide it into two notebooks, and use eight pages each time, first in one notebook, then in the other.
CXXXII—You will never look back.
CXXXIII—By an extreme weaving, you render a small space immense.
CXXXIV—The importance of numbers. For this is about time.
CXXXV—Make a point of method each week. The extreme importance of a regular rhythm. 8 : 2 = 4. 4 : 2 = 2. Everything two by two. You must always take eight together at each thunderbolt, never less.
CXXXVI—Do not proceed without desire. You must be attracted by this table. The error was to sometimes proceed "just like that," like someone who just wanted to put in his time.
CXXXVII—Divide yourself into sessions.

CXXXVIII—Go to the extremes, go to the end lightly.
CXXXIX—Afterwards, it is the visual phase, of intelligence, of weaving, before the naming.
CXL—The episode of the ear is tactile.
CXLI—Jean Verifice.
CXLII—A list of names on the horizon and the continuation of vertical subjects.
CXLIII—Night vision of the continuous text with numbers in the margins.
CXLIV—Like a martyred troop, like a horde of metaphysicians, like a metaphysical passion and a divine comedy without subject.
CXLV—Practice stylistic additions in more or less obscure sentences.
CXLVI—Subjects and names, drama and litany. The crossing of two dramaturgies: one of repetition, the other of resolution.
CXLVII—The idea of undoing a knot, the idea that this is resolved by a word at the end, each scene, each thunderbolt like a knot with a denouement at the end. Untie a knot of language.
CXLVIII—Damnation and salvation. Man against the physical, never to have done with it, repeated.
CXLIX—There would not always be names in the holes. Sometimes the exhausting litany would be interrupted. There can certainly once be a blank space between replies.
CL—But what will you do with the black cards? You must reread them before the phase of litanies and of isolated additions.
CLI—What was lost on the way is the idea of a "record action." It is displaced towards the litanies.
CLII—There is a central problem which is that of the broken voice, of punctuation: all must be able to be linked to a breath and read like a single sentence.
CLIII—The litany is like a record of verbs: it contains all the action, all the verbs, without saying them.
CLIV—I envision, for the continuation, phase 3—after the 2 of rereading and the 2a of names on the lips—as separated, written on the side and glued on afterwards, like the apex of names, the apex of birth and of the subject-verb-complement. As if I had done all this in order to make good my birth.
CLV—In the phase of additions, we shall examine what is lacking, we shall introduce a contrast in the application of the black cards, we shall also begin the repertory of names.
CLVI—I no longer know what is on the black cards, what now separates them from the red ones.
CLVII—A rhythmic counterpoint, the litany will be the most muscular part of the text, the inventory of verbs.
CLVIII—They will suffer like tortured ones without our ever knowing from what.

CLIX—Litanies of nomination and of generative action. Crucified multiplication. The clarity comes from there. Make the litanies before attributing the names. According to the intelligence, the maximum penetration having been thrust into the sentences.
CLX—The weaving of an extremely rigorous fabric of names, mathematical litanies.
CLXI—Under no pretext return to the principle of dates. Have done with it when necessary.
CLXII—The continuation by short theater sessions.
CLXIII—True names in the litany of names, take them and seize them too. But they are there uniquely as names, in the time or tense of names, and not as flesh.
CLXIV—The action always given by a verb, a theater prop.
CLXV—Between the Being of, the Man of.
CLXVI—Music of the visual impression.
CLXVII—In the litanies, visions of names: here would be the record of action, the refuge of the infernal round subject-verb-complement.
CLXVIII—The neologisms will be the names of men and medications.
CLXIX—Will the litanies of names contain historical actions? The war of Scipius. The partition of Joutasse. The entry of the Germans into the holes. Jambus crimes Bicerc, crimes Lima. Apricot 22, 1981. I have a sort of grandiose view. The idea of a great debauchery of names and inventions.
CLXX—Write a diary of dates without anything else.
CLXXI—Rediscover the practice of the theater as interrogative thought. The book of questions. I have lived things without answers. I live in things without questions.
CLXXII—Seen from something beyond all morality, spiritual comedy, endless violence.
CLXXIII—Angel of matter. The Angel of matter. He is the Angel of Matter.
CLXXIV—See the comical body, the comical suffering, the comical hospital.
CLXXV—The idea that there will finally be sentences without nouns and words without subjects.
CLXXVI—Always onward towards the spirit. Go always onward towards the spirit.
CLXXVII—Return to this continuous writing, immediately breathed, by hand, into the notebook.
CLXXVIII—Think of names, begin to recopy them. Form litanies without immediately incorporating them, for the text must be strengthened and muscled as much as possible.
CLXXIX—Diary of the drama. Diary of time. The impression that these hand to machine transfers made you lose years.
CLXXX—Help me! Strike me with thunderbolts!

CLXXXI—Continuity, rapidity, concentration, and the tongues will be freed. It is only by thrusting yourself into a continuum that you get there.
CLXXXII—As soon as the fortieth session is finished, note down on cards what follows in the red notebook and get to work immediately on the continuation: names and litanies.
CLXXXIII—Must Man always be spelled with a capital?
CLXXXIV—Like a cruelty in thought, prohibited today, yet which will first of all act upon you.
CLXXXV—Let the world not exist. This is your strength, your deepest conviction. Must repeat this every morning. I came there to say that the world does not exist. I had been sent for this.
CLXXXVI—Drama of life. I made all living beings up until now speak.
CLXXXVII—No words of objects or of anything. Nothing except the names of people.
CLXXXVIII—The world is a rhythmic catastrophe.
CLXXXIX—The word designates by dint of being repeated.
CXC—Always born by a visual idea of the text. This typographical question will be profoundly examined before joining together the two versions.
CXCI—Isolate men from their actions: the Hole that jumps, the blond Matricule.
CXCII—Litanise endless things and perpetual pains.
CXCIII—The French language is my professor of the unknown.
CXCIV—Will it be necessary afterwards to completely abandon your current manner of working by replicating, perpetual recopying, continuous refabrication, obligatory alternation between hand and machine?
CXCV—It is language which has always spoken the void to me.
CXCVI—I peopled the world with names.
CXCVII—The great return of meaning. Say what has never been said. Writing is dead for no longer thinking.
CXCVIII—Am only your path of ignorance.
CXCIX—Enter Adam.
CC—I had to completely reconstitute my brain.
CCI—Not too many different names in the margins, save exceptions. But never the same from one scene to another.
CCII—The litany of names would return in bundles, irregular falls: a list of men, a list of names, an account of numbers. The litany is very precise, as precise as a registry office, as a precise inventory, not an outburst. It is a counterpoint of exactitude to the outburst.
CCIII—A book that will have undergone a destruction, which will return from a destruction.
CCIV—An echo from one scene to another, from one thunderbolt to another. By the resumption through refrain of knots of language.

CCV—You have never looked back. But time won't have passed inside in vain.
CCVI—Always think of training. Live athletically. And especially pay attention to matters.
CCVII—The time rediscovered of the entirety of humanity.
CCVIII—A thousand thunderbolts of comic cruelty.
CCIX—Nothing will be made of all that, if it is not a matter of being freed at times from the horror of being.
CCX—Graphic. Gestural. Musician.
CCXI—I have read that God has written nothing. I have read that all of his writings were done by men. I have read that God has written everything. I have read that all of my writings are written by him.
CCXII—Musician. You work through music: transpose, lengthen, shorten, displace. Joy in music, make way for music! It is good for you, for your spirit, to displace, to transpose.
CCXIII—A man who lives only by speaking. I witness my spirit.
CCXIV—Do not use the names of litanies right away. These are two texts which will cross and which will be all the more muscular as they pass towards the end of their support for each other, each muscular for the other.
CCXV—Several hours each day in order to regain the concentration which you constantly lose. A man who lost and regained his breath each morning.
CCXVI—You will always recopy these incomprehensible slogans.
CCXVII—Lot. Your enemy behind you. Never turn around. This book is your enemy.
CCXVIII—A list of names in a litany. Will the speakers be uniquely men? Is man the son of the animals?
CCXIX—He recites the drama of life.
CCXX—Like a type of cruelty which is prohibited today and which would be practised. But which has nothing to do, nothing at all, with any sex. The prohibition is on time and reproduction.
CCXXI—The world does not exist. A sentence to be repeated every morning.
CCXXII—Practicing. Five hours per day of pure mental practice.
CCXXIII—People the world with names.
CCXXIV—All writing as a hindrance to speaking, as a detour to say nothing. Break with that!
CCXXV—The importance of typography, of the visual existence of the sounds of thought.
CCXXVI—Syntax. Will you have sufficiently examined it?
CCXXVII—Man always in capitals.
CCXXVIII—The litanies are the tense of verbs, of a copopulation. The litanies are the moment of the real, all mental work is done by hand. An opaque litany, outside of the aerial text. A list of names born from the

subject-verb-complement. Litanistic rhythmic, a concatenation for the ear. Like a chronic registry.
CCXXIX—Between litanies, scenes of maximum visibility in the night.
CCXXX—You will only escape it through action, by a redoubling of action.
CCXXXI—Prohibited thought.
CCXXXII—Prohibition of the production, of the reproduction of living beings.
CCXXXIII—Repetition of the stage names of the last three. Man of this scene.
CCXXXIV—Names of speakers in the margin. The multitude will not be there.
CCXXXV—Write nothing that is not on the far side of suicide.
CCXXXVI—Eight replies, eight litanies, eight lines. Forty days.
CCXXXVII—Alternation of tensions. The ensemble in a dual rhythm, in a rhythm of a duel against the self. Farther away than a negativity.
CCXXXVIII—Always keep the seven elements before you, in the form of pages, as things at hand and which can be opened at every instant.
CCXXXIX—A nominal novel: action reduced to nomination.
CCXL—One thousand nine hundred forty-two. One thousand nine hundred forty-three.
CCXLI—Divide yourself into action, divide yourself each day into work sessions. In each session say the number of the Animal of Time.
CCXLII—The Man of John crimes Sapor, Achul is born. The Man of Nubien enters.
CCXLIII—Here is born the drama of life. Here ends the drama of life.
CCXLIV—The ANIMAL OF TIME: Eight.
CCXLV—The two litanies, the vertical and the horizontal, like a terrible prayer list, like a terrible chain of light.
CCXLVI—Strike. Never refuse anything of what is written. Leave twenty-six pages aside. Enter into a frightening hole.
CCXLVII—For the last time.
CCXLVIII—No repetitions on the horizontal list.
CCXLIX—Repetitive triplet. You are torn between the rhythmic impulse and the accounting impulse.
CCL—The idea of alternating between a mental day and a typing day.
CCLI—The constructions dry up: it's when you are tired that you lose yourself in mathematics.
CCLII—You must follow it to the end without ever backing up.
CCLIII—Rediscover gesturalness and sudden loomings. Beware of mathematical ossification.
CCLIV—The history of the spirit. A spiritual tale.
CCLV—One thousand seven hundred times the letter *a* to end, one thousand seven hundred, as many as there are speaking beings.

CCLVI—I can't believe that I am in a man. No sensation of my brain. I never had one.
CCLVII—I work through man, not language. I ask for forty days.
CCLVIII—You must have the experience of time, the passage across numbers.
CCLIX—To be simultaneously more absent and more present to the world.
CCLX—You must thrust yourself into the action, multiply yourself in the action and displace yourself. Be transient.
CCLXI—The essential is done, the essential is written. There remains to be done only the names and numbers.
CCLXII—Your crucifixion table. Joyfully, if you can.
CCLXIII—Always the work of the horrible thing without number.
CCLXIV—Will it not be necessary for a thread to cause all the few pages of the Man of Valère to be reborn, like someone who is not, like someone who was gripped by the drama and who didn't get to be born?
CCLXV—The actor of the world. The actor of languages. Names and subjects. Never any woman's name. I never succeeded in being born.
CCLXVI—Litanise as it happens, without accounting for it too much. Now the principal task is to give names, to make the litanies flow. Expenditure is more important than saving.
CCLXVII—The Calvary of names. An atrocious chain. Name the speakers. Say it with any names whatsoever, so long as they do not return.
CCLXVIII—To be freed from the drama of life. To be the actor of the void.
CCLXIX—At no time is it a question of writing yet one more novel. It is only a question of an adventure of the spirit.
CCLXX—Did you end with the comic scene? You have only worked in unconsciousness.
CCLXXI—The impression that I no longer write before men. The impression that I do not write for men but that I was entrusted with making an object outside of the world.
CCLXXII—Proceed separated. You will only proceed separated.
CCLXXIII—It is not at all language that concerns you, but life itself.
CCLXXIV—Something so terrible to see that you proceed within it only obliquely.
CCLXXV—Attempt to rediscover the sensation of life afterwards.
CCLXXVI—All men rest on my head.
CCLXXVII—Actor of the world.
CCLXXVIII—The end of theaters. Entrance into generative literature.
CCLXXIX—Still not used to waking up in a man, never. In any case, never more than six or eight times up to now.
CCLXXX—You will rediscover speed and thought at the same time.
CCLXXXI—Passage through the innovation of tongues.

CCLXXXII—Go again, doubtlessly still more and more, towards clarity and the knot.
CCLXXXIII—Repeat all these stupid slogans every day, in this stupid order, as such, and never wish to apply anything.
CCLXXXIV—Two hundred eighty-three slogans, to be endlessly repeated, to be reread every day, to be recopied forty times without understanding them.
CCLXXXV—Slogans before entering. Slogans of the actor before coming on stage. Repeat especially those that you do not understand. Repeat those which worked on the text. Repeat those which have remained without action. Repeat them without a goal. Repeat endlessly.
CCLXXXVI—What works is to be found between each slogan.
CCLXXXVII—Falls of thunderbolts. Stupid catchwords. Repeat these empty sentences. Always keep them before your eyes. Recopy forty times.
CCLXXXVIII—These are the two hundred eighty-eight slogans of the book *Le Soleil, Le Drame de la vie*, written over seven years, written and lost. One thousand nine hundred seventy-five, one thousand nine hundred eighty-two. You repeat them every day. It is your daily rehearsal.

• "Imperatives" is a translation of "Impératifs," published in *Le Théâtre des paroles* (Paris , P.O. L., 1989), bearing the following notice: "*Imperatives*, two hundred eighty-eight slogans repeated from 1975-1982 during the writing of *Le Drame de la vie*." Valère Novarina, who resides in Paris, is the author of the following works:
Le Drame de la vie (Paris, P.O.L., 1984)
Cent dessins (Paris, Editions Beba/Le Consortium, 1986)
Le Discours aux animaux (Paris, P.O.L., 1987)
Théâtre [L'Atelier volant; Le Babil des classes dangereuses; Le Monologue d'Adramélech; La Lutte des morts; Falstafe] (Paris, P.O.L., 1989)
Vous qui habitez le temps (Paris, P.O.L., 1989)
His theater has been widely produced; in 1989, three of his pieces were performed at the Festival d'Avignon.

[I wish to thank Valère Novarina and Chantal Thomas for their help in establishing this translation.]

ALISON BUNDY

FOUR STORIES

THE STUDENT

There is much to learn, for I am young and empty-headed, knowing nothing. When I encounter a new person, I greet him with questions, I am quick to demonstrate my ignorance. I insist on being called Idiot, Dunce, Dunderhead, Moron. And if my demeanor angers this person, and he is provoked to slap me in reprimand, so much the better. There is much instruction therein; I am a sack waiting to be filled; someday I too may know enough to hit someone lightly, to deliver, out of love and with consideration for a person's best welfare, a gentle and stern slap in the face.

But for now I am called Pupil, and not for nothing do I stand about, mouth open, eyes blank, on the verge of thought.

I take a walk and make note of my surroundings—the unpaved road, the small, dry grass along it, the dirt on my shoes. I raise my head. There is a little bridge, there a stream. The white duck swims nicely. The phrase "I am in the country" comes to mind—it would be a true and even courageous statement, but I cannot bring myself quite yet to utter it. The sky is blue today. Lord, I was made in the image of chaos, forsake me not utterly. When I fall, let others raise me up.

Suddenly, I recall my purpose, and study nature to find my own. I observe the tree, the bug, the bird, and know these speak to me of something great—but speak a foreign tongue. I squint and fret. The tree, the bug, the bird, the man. There is something there to understand, but the unruly waters of my inferiority are rising, and I shall soon drown in abject stupidity. I comprehend nothing from a fact. Bug man bird tree. Is this thought? Tree bug man bird. (Quickly, please, tell which I am.)

Meanwhile—I stand—or think I stand—in the middle of the road—, eagerly—, oh tenderly, awaiting your corrective hand.

NEVER A CURE FOR THIS

The boy thinks of the girl. She is a small figure in his mind. He feels he misses her. Indeed, he misses her. He writes to her, I wonder if it would be so bad to be a vampire. What I mean is, I wish we were vampires so we could suck each other's blood. We would hear our hearts pounding together in our ears. Would it really be so bad to be set apart from the world like that?

He seals the letter and sends it off. Days go by. Each time he thinks of the girl she appears to have grown smaller. When he speaks, he hears his voice as if it belongs to someone else.

And by the time the girl realizes what has happened, the boy could be anywhere. He could be walking down a road, by trees, he could be doing this, or that, he could be on a lake, rowing, he could be anywhere.

A SENTIMENTAL MEMORY

I

In 1925, exactly one decade before my mother was born, the handsome Mosjoukine stood by the sea, ready to enter the casino and win. I was sitting, at the time, on the marble steps of the Cafe Rialto, facing the boardwalk—an ugly child in an unspeakable white dress and bonnet, playing with painted wooden toys. To be precise, I was two years old, had set the stiff green horse in the little yellow cart, and was commencing, in a rage of boredom, to knock him on the snout with a red rectangle. Then M. stopped before me to contemplate the doors that opened to the casino's hall, and I saw his fine eye fill with integrity and luck. He had a marvelous pallor, and I knew women fell when he walked. The sea extending out behind him seemed nothing when he stood by it, and I felt I was at the boundary of a strange bright land.

Is there a puzzle whose solution is simply the fact of the puzzle's existence? When M. bowed his head slightly and set off toward the casino, I formed my skirt into a kind of pouch, installed my toys therein, and followed.

(Mosjoukine was a Russian actor. This story makes reference to a silent film directed by Marcel L'Herbier, ***Feu Mathias Pascal***, in which M. plays the lead role.)

II

Now love is fine, but luck is better. A lucky man gets what he wants and more; he is an emblem of positive possibility. The forest is set up for him to walk through. And, whereas a man in love may dream of his beloved and not notice the passing of time, a man in luck can stop a clock. He is also popular: for, just as luck is his vehicle, so people think he might become their vehicle, and aid them in achieving their myriad desires.

In short, the lesson says a man in luck is a good dream made real. The reason ladies fell before M. was that he produced in them a powerful nostalgia for something they had never had.

III

So I went into the flamboyant and cruel casino. A great crowd circulated on the floor, and I became lost in it, emerging some time later, without my toys, onto a small flight of stairs, where I stood taking a view. I could see I was late, but maybe not too late. M. had money stuck in his ears but had not yet turned coy. I had plans to attach myself zealously to him, and cling like a leech, and I started toward his table just as he stood up from it. The ladies clustered about him, but he made his way through. Now is my chance, I thought, and as he came near I lifted my arms and opened my mouth to speak.

At that time, a shadow fell over me, and my heart stopped, and I was unable to say what I had to. I was resuscitated some thirty-six years later, and tell this story, not for money, but out of love, and to slow the passing of time somewhat.

A MATTER OF ANIMALS

I

Once there was a man so ugly it pained him to look in the mirror, and indeed, when he grew up he took to drinking. He had no chin and no forehead, but his faculties were intact, and there the problem begins. His flesh troubled him because it troubled others more. He could not close the rift and join the gaping ends; pleasures of the body shamed him and smoke made him cough.

Any peace found in early youth in the company of animals vanished when he began to wish to command them, as is the wont of exiles who do

not choose their status and who are dejected. The bird would not alight twittering on his wrist, nor the fish consort with the turtle at his behest.

II

Certainly he will have had a mother, a sharply divided character who wavered between optimism and dismay. Avoidance of her progeny was the better part of consolation, but her conscience retaliated, and with falsely-placed motherhood she vowed to shelter the boy till she died. Strangers and mirrors were the objects of her wrath; she steered the provocative child away from still water when they walked.

But the schoolyard, like a monstrous glass, rose up in the distance beyond her dominion, to show the boy his place and confirm his suspicions. Children are never so beastly as when picking out the beast among them. He stood by the fence and sucked on a stone, and called it companion, and was notorious.

"The handsome man falters because the wind is strong—
The ugly man, because he walketh wrong."

The corrupt motto rang in the chasm of his ears and caused him to lie down in the tall grass like sin, to conceal himself.

III

Yet he could not repent of his face, or its effect on his character. Behind his mother's house a great field sloped down to a wood, and there he sulked along the ridge of a stream, and broke a branch from a tree. Grief had been a compulsion with him from the day he was born. He stumbled on the uneven earth, and wondered what was to become his place in the world, his poverty, his privilege.

Following the stream far into the woods, the boy grew tired, and sat down beneath a tree to rest. He closed his eyes for a moment, or longer, until he heard a faint droning sound, and looked up to see a wasps' nest high above him. He jumped and raised his stick to swat at it; he hit it once and it did not fall. He swung again, and again, until the pale grey balloon dropped from the crook of the tree into a small pile of leaves.

The boy prodded the fallen nest with the end of the branch. Wasps hovered about it; he waved them away, but one settled on his arm, stinging him. He winced and drew back slightly, only to bend closer the next minute, over the papery mass, as the ground seemed to turn, and he leaned his wondrous head down, as if regarding a beloved object; and the wasps rose and settled upon his face, crawling over it as if he were stone, or mute

wood, crowding over his eyes and mouth; and like a boy falling to a familiar bed, the glorious child went down, and rested his head on the tatter of nest and leaves, amid the humming wasps, went down to meet the darkness, whose form is not memory but forgetting, the good darkness, the darkness of no rebuke.

in memoriam

Mary Oppen

November 28, 1908
to
May 14, 1990

"I come as a guest entering my own life."

PROSE LOOK SETTLED

PROSE LOOK SETTLED 1—FIRST LUCAS

Look.

Tool about rack always. It. There.

Where does like? Pun. Lull tool tong does from? Uncle tone home wanted tong.

It ideal. The ideal. Nettle always is. Where feature tool? Where this toenail hearken our off? It at. We.

Winch can. Miscreant. Winch flavor always. Hearken gravel flavor winter. Recreate wanted uncle. Look. The. Think. The ideal. Idea wrest idea warbler cannot not you. Recreate positivist slide.

Necessary. Sell. Lull exist entertain. Interest never. Cannot. Necessary lackadaisical. Entertain ichor as unshakable. Interest miscreant, unshakable. Lackadaisical. Unshakable. Miscreant unshakable. Unshakable. Unshakable. You foredoom you can hap cannot. Like heat-seeker. Leaf about is whole necessary. Act. About.

Wrote about wrestle sweat feature rack court gravel cannot. Secretive. Secretive zero zenith foredoom through which breathe? Wrest does wrest. Wrestle outside. Zero zenith. Tone positivist clinch. Entertain exist think wrestle zenith past rack unshakable. Nettle must fistic. Miscreant fancier never. Paisley necessary. Miscreant. Miscreant think through which turn. Hearken outside; of it; on nettle sweeten favor harmless. Harmless. Interest clinch flavor exist think clinch breathe? Come glowworm whatever classic. Glasses? Toenail. Classic content forest tent. Winter. Recreate content recreate slide sweat breathe? Idea wrest fancier net whatever. Settled through. Feature. Heat-seeker miscreant, unshakable. Which never. Harmless. Necessary miscreant.

PROSE LOOK SETTLED 2— FIRST REVERSE LUCAS

Interest at. Ideal, as never net. Never. Necessary miscreant nose net. Settled whole. Like tone which. Favor slide. Classic gravel flavor winter. Recreate wanted uncle. Look. Court. You court recreate sweat see we. Lull tool glowworm net settled uncle. Interest hash. Unshakable. Unshakable. Unshakable. Miscreant unshakable. Unshakable. Unshakable. You foredoom you outside; outside not classic fancier lackadaisical. Outside fancier nose warbler like foredoom glowworm foredoom. Glowworm net. Settled. Act past nettle harmless. Get wrest whatever gravel. Where wrestle tone he wanted wont? It. It you.

To. Court miscreant outside must fistic. Like fancier lackadaisical. Lackadaisical toenail wanted necessary. Entertain. Lackadaisical. Lackadaisical. Lackadaisical. Lackadaisical. Lackadaisical. Lull. Lull. Sell tent you tool whole. There. Where our zero? Through which? There slide miscreant which tone home wanted. Tong recreate settler back.

Hearken slide. Recreate content recreate always slide always sweat. Always necessary tool outside our toenail breathe. Pair occurs pack tool through wrestle recreate. Wanted. Connects take. Connects. Not necessary. Favor. Entertain ichor. The.

Think. The we think tool whole slide sweat glowworm pair slide connects. Connects to. Connects clinch member. Connects content. Harmless. Fistic.

Fistic. Positivist content fancier. Connects. It.

It is not does home take hap harmless. Past warbler harmless rambling. Miscreant.

Interest harmless.

PROSE LOOK SETTLED 3—SECOND LUCAS

Hearken net.

Flavor. Court think miscreant. Hearken outside; outside not classic fancier lackadaisical.

Outside our not classic. Outside; wanted whatever you. Tong you. Connects take.

Connects clinch flavor. Entertain tool. The. Ideal. Court secretive. Interest is never court get nettle tent lackadaisical. Never.

Necessary heat-seeker lackadaisical. Whatever necessary classic. Always glasses? Paisley glasses toenail. Classic content forest tent. Winter. Recreate content recreate whole. There. Where recreate? Where does come wrest this see sweeten? Where sweat?

Sweeten favor. Hearken flavor winter feature flavor outside lackadaisical. Fistic. Like come. Must fistic. Positivist which? Never harmless necessary. Miscreant. Miscreant back. Breathe? Wrest idea wrest breathe. Wrestle past outside; tong home he whatever fistic. Occurs. Feature. Heat-seeker. Heat-seeker wrest. Wrong. Toenail wrestle.

Zenith flavor rack. Can. Miscreant outside nettle fancier lackadaisical. Pair. lackadaisical pack toenail outside necessary. Entertain. Lackadaisical. Lackadaisical. Lackadaisical. Lackadaisical. Lull. Sell tent you tool whole. There not content. Tong recreate get lackadaisical. Where whole recreate connects recreate pack. Favor slide. Hearken. Winch. The. ideal, court secretive does tool. Where does this pair glasses? Glasses tent outside; Our. Lull net outside. Lackadaisical. Wrestle. Ichor ideal, the ideal. Court. You come nose hinge necessary classic. Must always.

PROSE LOOK SETTLED 4— SECOND REVERSE LUCAS

Wrestle recreate. Heat-seeker unshakable. Heat-seeker wrest idea classic. About tent. Where which wrestle? It ideal, the ideal. Feature rack tent which fistic. Harmless. Fancier Lackadaisical. Pair. Lackadaisical pack toenail outside necessary. Entertain lackadaisical. Lackadaisical. Lackadaisical. Lackadaisical. Flavor wrestle tool harmless. Where fancier tong heat-seeker? Wanted wanted on outside; harmless. Nose? Tool past tone wrote. Wont connects fistic. Tong look them connects lackadaisical. Toenail of glasses? Glasses tool glowworm foredoom fancier glowworm warbler cannot our warbler settled settler fancier. Net. Settled. Act we sell secretive zero wrestle. Winch through hearken content. Where whatever breathe.

Necessary. Where he connects rambling. Tong wrong flavor. Entertain back. Breathe? wrest idea wrest breathe. Wrestle sweeten hearken net settled rambling settler. Settled uncle entertain secretive sell gravel it; it outside; outside our hinge like tone tong recreate which whatever look whole slide. It. It. It is. Loan hinge like come nose wont net not necessary occurs take glasses. Occurs necessary. Necessary classic. Always glasses? Paisley glasses toenail. Classic. Winch.

The. Ideal, court secretive does tool. Where does a whole them about? Lull recreate syzygy fistic. Side come connects positivist rambling never. Favor gravel tool harmless. Miscreant. Pun nose wont an always sweat always occurs about past pack which recreate outside off. Positivist rambling. Miscreant. Nettle rack.

Court. Rob tone home. Sentient. Entertain hap you cóme nose hinge necessary glasses? Glasses gravel outside; necessary. Miscreant. Interest ichor at.

Never net. Never. Necessary miscreant outside occurs secretive. Occurs miscreant.

Heat-seeker tool tong. Uncle as think. Court think rack like come this whatever breathe.

From?

PROSE LOOK 5—THIRD LUCAS

Of off.

Off. Positivist rambling. Clinch.

Paisley. Nettle. Sweeten. Paisley foredoom no harmless.

Nose? Foredoom. Glowworm foredoom glowworm net we. Settled. Must. Paisley nettle wanted hash. Zenith.

Past gravel outside; our uncle hap harmless positivist hash. Leaf. Secretive exact. Leaf as about tool occurs about secretive zero. Pack. Where recreate forest? Secretive zero. Zenith. Harmless. Through which wrestle. See outside positivist gravel.

Heat-seeker zero. Zenith tone zenith exist clinch. Exist. Exist slide outside positivist rambling. Miscreant. Nettle net. Sell. Entertain winter settler. Warbler get always. Hearken outside; necessary miscreant glasses? Occurs on glasses gravel hearken gravel winter wrestle. Tone. He sentient. Past never court outside must outside; outside fancier lackadaisical. Outside see sweeten. Where nose? Wrestle warbler rambling act. Occurs.

Not. Paisley. Pack rack. Sink. Fancier. Lackadaisical. Never through never. Hap harmless. Hap harmless. Past warbler harmless rambling. Miscreant. Interest harmless. Winch. The. Ideal, court secretive does tool. Where does heat-seeker net whatever? Where hearken warbler rambling outside turn through never look positivist take? Loan pun. Lull tool tong. Wont. Glowworm uncle tone home. Sentient. Tong rack. Sell secretive court gravel recreate connects heat-seeker see syzygy. Wrong syzygy through which zero through. Feature through which whatever slide which. Winch winter. Heat-seeker zero. Zenith zero through which breathe?

PROSE LOOK SETTLED 6— THIRD REVERSE LUCAS

Wrest does rest. Wrestle outside; zero zenith. Tone positivist clinch. Entertain exist think wrestle zenith past rack unshakable. Nettle recreate connects rob tone home wanted sweeten hap does home never hap hearken whole gravel tool settler. Wanted. Settled. Leaf wrestle. Wrote rack. Can. Past content outside which tong can fistic. There not. Where toenail positivist. Toenail glowworm flavor about glowworm foredoom. Fancier. Glowworm warbler hash. Zero warbler. Settled glasses? Glowworm net settled act slide recreate settler. Wanted harmless hearken. Settled uncle entertain secretive sell gravel which. There. Hearken content. Where whatever breathe. Necessary *a* occurs nettle. Exist. Exist whatever exact positivist wrong never look you. Whole. Pack about.

At. The. Think. The we think tool whole slide sweat glowworm pair slide connects. Connects to. Connects clinch member. Connects content. Harmless. Fistic. Fistic. Positivist content fancier. Connects. It; pair rob hash. Zenith. Exist toenail positivist rambling back. Rambling. Member. Paisley.

Toenail sentient. Rambling not you. Settler outside pun. Settler. Wrestle. Sentient. Outside; you not you. Tong look. Connects tong. Recreate settler. Uncle.

Secretive wrote recreate connects heat-seeker see syzygy. Wrong syzygy. See net settled whatever rambling settler fancier. Wrong wrestle. Wrote think syzygy through outside turn. Connects back. Can necessary lackadaisical?

Where fancier wanted wont whatever wanted tent, where our through which whatever slide which? Winch ichor at. Never net. Never.

Necessary miscreant *a* occurs nettle past pack recreate look, look you. Whole. Pack about.

At.

PROSE LOOK SETTLED 7—FOURTH LUCAS

Flavor rack.

Never through never. Hap harmless. Hap harmless.

Past warbler harmless rambling. Miscreant. Interest harmless. Hearken net.

Flavor. Court think miscreant. Hearken not necessary get idea it; it is of outside; act does fistic. Outside you. To. Court of occurs secretive.

Occurs miscreant. Heat-seeker tool tong. Syzygy glowworm exist slide connects cannot. not content. Toenail whatever connects recreate harmless us as thin. Court is it? Pun tool nose zenith. Exist toenail positivist. Tong back. Take necessary. Tent.

The. Ideal, Harmless. Outside; of off. Tent. Where does which whatever look whole slide syzygy slide? Slide. Slide connects cannot. Not content. Toenail whatever connects recreate harmless fistic. Miscreant. Hash. Past. Sentient. Connects. It; pair rob hash. Zenith. Exist toenail positivist rambling back. Rambling.

Member. Paisley. Toenail sentient. Rambling not you. Settler never hearken. Occurs take necessary. Heat-seeker lackadaisical. Necessary classic. Always glasses? Paisley glasses toenail. Classic content forest tent. Winter. Recreate content recreate slide sweat breathe? Idea wrest fancier net whatever. Settled through. Feature. Heat-seeker miscreant, unshakable. Which never. Harmless. Necessary miscreant. Interest. Entertain settler. Tone ichor sentient. Interest. Interest clinch flavor exist think clinch breathe? Fancier tool our nose necessary secretive miscreant. Member. Home. Warbler whatever.

PROSE LOOK SETTLED 8— FOURTH REVERSE LUCAS

Feature. Paisley. Pack exist wrestle nettle harmless. Paisley foredoom no harmless. nose? Foredoom. Glowworm foredoom glowworm net we. Settled. Must. Paisley nettle glasses gravel hearken gravel winter wrestle. Tone. He sentient. Past sweat breathe? come wrest fancier sweeten act not pack. Favor. Occurs. Pack favor. Hap never through never. Hap harmless. Hap harmless. Past warbler harmless rambling. Miscreant. Interest harmless. Hearken net. Flavor. Court think miscreant. Hearken not necessary get wrest hinge tone which. Favor slide. Classic gravel flavor winter.

Recreate wanted uncle. Look. Court. You court recreate sweat see we? Lull tool. Exist uncle act never. Favor forest. Entertain lackadaisical. Entertain we miscreant content feature gravel feature see hinge tone pack. Lull tool whatever connects positivist outside. Tong hap hearken. Classic content. Heat-seeker wrestle. Recreate heat-seeker heat-seeker. Heat-seeker wrest. Wrong. Toenail wrestle. Zenith flavor rack.

Can. Miscreant outside nettle fancier lackadaisical pair. Lackadaisical pack toenail outside necessary. Entertain lackadaisical. Lackadaisical. Lackadaisical. Lackadaisical. Lull. Lull. Sell tent you tool whole.

There not content. Tong recreate get lackadaisical. Where whole recreate connects recreate syzygy wrong syzygy settler. Net. Settled past. Ideal, miscreant fancier. Where wrest from?

Toenail syzygy which past tone wrote. Wanted outside wrong look. Connects fistic. Tent.

Court wrest. Wrong. Toenail classic toenail glowworm classic.

Whole glowworm foredoom fancier glowworm warbler cannot our warbler settled settler fancier?

PROSE LOOK SETTLED 9—
TRUNCATE TURNING LUCAS

Net.

Settled. Sell. Leaf.

Interest content nettle harmless. Settled uncle on secretive. Lull recreate home fistic. Tong tong.

Recreate hinge hash. Past. Unshakable. Leaf we classic? Leaf about. Wrote about wrestle sweat feature rack court gravel cannot. Secretive.

Secretive zero zenith foredoom through which breathe? Wrest does wrest. Wrestle outside; zero zenith. Tone positivist clinch. Entertain exist think wrestle zenith past rack unshakable. Nettle recreate connects rob tone home wanted sweeten hap does wanted ichor. Act ichor zero miscreant sweat feature. Winch nettle fistic. Harmless. Hearken. Interest.

View. Winch. The glowworm an aver. The. Court as occurs nettle. Exist. Exist whatever exact positivist.

3 August & 18 December 1989
New York

Note about the Writing of "Prose Look Settled"

In August 1989 I derived the nine-part poem "Prose Look Settled" from my poems "Look" (7/30/89) and "Prose Look" (8/1–2/89). "Look" was made from a repunctuated chance-operational mix of the words of my intuitively written poem "Twenties 4" (5/1/89) and G.E.M. Anscombe's English translation of Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* I, 103, by inputting the mix to Charles O. Hartman's text-manipulation program DIASTEXT (an automation of one of my diastic text-selection methods developed in January 1963) and by rule-guided reformatting and repunctuation of the output. "Prose Look" was obtained from "Look" by rule-guided reformatting and various Lucas-series regroupings of the latter's sentences. The Lucas series 1, 3, 4, 7, 11, 18, 29 and its reverse determined alternately the number of sentences in the successive paragraph/strophes of each part of the poem up to the ninth, in which the series "turns" (reverses) after the fifth (11-sentence) paragraph/strophe, so that the last one comprises seven sentences and the number series is thus truncate(d). The "settled" version was obtained from "Prose Look" by further rule-guided editing of the sentences.

CHARLES NORTH

TWO POEMS

ALBUMBLATT

The sun is down, around the throat
if you mean the invoice is enclosed; stirred
to fit in with the golden appurtenances of
hearsay as in going outside to breathe, letting

the trees go on it's just
sitting there on the blown street
a pile of leaves for our friends
the earthworms hair skin
eyes lips to miss

THE DAWN

"The dawn was contagious, spreading
rapidly about the heavens."—Flann O'Brien

TO BE

Immortal.

ONLY

A pencil line of sunlight is climbing
Straight up the chimney, stopping about two inches
From the top

IMPINGING

On a template of powder blue without end

IT FOLLOWS THAT

Compressed, highlighted and seductively polished
Within a naturally limited theater of operations
Snow or sleet, the occasional burst rising to produce
A new century

SPACE IS FURIOUS

Still beneath the roof of your hair
The dials keynote our penchant for constructing
Problems that test the ground underneath, reflecting wintergreen
All the way up to buildings including several different varieties

THE WAY IT PRODDED

All nabis and all
Oily charm, conveniently summarized
Which is not to say without vague hopes of escape into the
evening sky

PARTICULARLY THE DAWN

Approximately fifteen feet back from where
The houses, secure at least temporarily from flattening,
Peered out over what had been left of the horizon—that is,
What hadn't been previously usurped
By the "developers"

WHEN LAST WE

Met.

EVEN NOW

Your arms are the unencumbered coastline

LIKE AN ALTO SAXOPHONE

With cherries in the bell. It isn't
Selected cities

LIMNING

And individuating green light; as though some passing cloud

SOFTER THAN LASERS TO STYROFOAM

Not exactly carried aloft like the anthem of autumn
But a rubric of sopping wet air that
Has aimed its complement in a forthcoming way

A SWEET SMELL

Like the armpit
Of an angel

OR PERFECTION OF THE LIFE

The earth is
Pulled up to the surface, or
The surface is pulled down till it hits; either way
The blue is spooned over lush

WHY I AM NOT A GERMAN ROMANTIC

THE PLACE OF RUNNING BOARDS

If, and it's a big one,
This clumsy desire to be confined to you and you only
Means hammering out the decision
Where all is difficult to see

AS THOUGH EACH FRAGRANT CAUSEWAY

Doubled the space between monsters—I mean trampling
The news from the perspective of summer
Until the only boarder of note sheds quality
In the form of clothespins pushed up towards the thinnest leaf

NOT BEING, OR BEING NOT BEING

The primroses

OF MY DISCONTENT

Not the shoal
Where we argue the limitless side, but somehow
Swarming down the coal chute to be played
According to those golden notions of equal
And opposite reaction, swallowed up by, at least
In part, the same religious architecture
That works on the mind like feelers, extending even into the current

LIKE CARROTS TO HILLS

The gray carrots, and the almost
Maple rolling hills

THOMAS VOGLER

"NOW WE LIVE IN KIT'S HOUSE"

—Ron Silliman, *Tjanting*

formerly finally and as house to house
and a house to house and as formerly finally
—Gertrude Stein, *A Birthday Book*

Yes, we've all heard about Kit Smart, the eighteenth-century lunatic poet who wrote about his Cat Jeoffry while confined in a madhouse. But who reads the fragmentary work in which these famous lines appear? What governs (facilitating? mediating? inhibiting?) our access to this work? What do we actually know about the material conditions and protocols of its production—or about the various re-productions that presume to bring it within the reach of our late-twentieth-century grasp?

Smart's confinement was not the usual metaphoric one, to the epistemological prison of the Cartesian subject; nor was it the self-imposed psychological agony of a Hamlet ("for there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so: to me it is a prison") or a Macbeth ("cabin'd, cribb'd, confined, bound in / To saucy doubts and fears"). It was to literal madhouses, for two extended periods between March of 1757 and January of 1763, lasting at least five and possibly six of his forty-nine years. Like all of us he was confined too in the "prisonhouse of language"; but that prison was for him a literal one—*literally* literal, in which he struggled in his writing to transform his situation from the "jeopardy" of being "deserted of the grace of God" to the bliss of being "desert-ed" ("For being desert-ed is to have desert in the sight of God and entitles one to the Lord's merit"). In his writing he identified "with the Skuttle-Fish, who foils his foe by the effusion of his ink," while trying to write "a way to the terrestrial paradise" on his knees. Some of the physical aspects of Smart's confinement were relatively benign, even by the enlightened later eighteenth-century standards that evolved as madness became an affliction that ranged from poets and proof-readers to queens and monarchs. He was allowed a few reference books, access to newspapers, and some limited materials for writing. Without glamorizing his condition, one could even argue that it freed him from the desperate frenzy of writing for money, as a Grub-Street pen-for-hire who could turn out anything from

prize-winning Odes on The Supreme Being to *Mother Midnight's Comical Pocket-Book,* from six-volume encyclopedias like *The Wonders of Nature and Art* to monthly periodicals like *The Universal Visitor,* all the way down to bawdy tavern songs for a wooden-legged dancer (M. Timbertoe from "The Opera in Paris") to be sung in reviews where Smart himself—former Fellow of Cambridge, Praelector in Philosophy and Rhetoric—appeared in drag as mistress of ceremonies. His prophecy in the madhouse ("For I prophecy that they will not dare to imprison a brother or sister for debt") proved alltoowrong, for a few years after his release he was confined again, this time to a debtor's prison where he died in 1771. This confinement is harder to euphemize, even though he was able to produce a final work there called *Hymns for the Amusement of Children.*

We may never know why Smart was locked up for so many years, while someone like the notorious Alexander Cruden was confined for only a few weeks. After his release, when not earning his living as a "corrector of the press," or proof-reader, Cruden roamed the streets of London "correcting" improper speech and behavior, and engaging in prolonged efforts to be nominated CORRECTOR OF THE PEOPLE by act of Parliament.[1] The only clues we have about the reasons for Smart's confinement, apart from those in the poetry, come from his friend Samuel Johnson, who observed that "madness frequently discovers itself merely by unnecessary deviation from the usual modes of the world," claiming that Smart was locked up for saying his prayers in the streets and for not wearing clean clothes. If Johnson was right, then Smart's confinement turned on problems of *decorum* that made his presence unbearable to others ("For I blessed God in St. James's Park till I routed all the company"). Similar problems of decorum have plagued the reception and transmission of his "madhouse" poem, *Jubilate Agno,* and have led to a form of textual confinement that deserves some consideration.

Jubilate Agno is the name for thirteen large pieces of paper (loose folio leaves, ten single, three double) that contain thirty-two pages of what was obviously a larger work. They are in the protective custody of the Houghton Library at Harvard University, where with proper scholarly credentials, after filling out an "Application For The Examination Of Manuscripts" (call-number f MS Eng 719) they may be seen during visiting hours. This unique autographic manuscript first saw print in 1939, published by Henry Holt under the title *Rejoice in the Lamb: A Song from Bedlam,* edited by William Force Stead. For Stead Smart was a "feckless, drunken, crazy little man" whose "fundamental brainwork has broken down." He was "guilty of bad taste" and "ruinously weak in will." The fragmentary manuscript Stead painstakingly edited contained "plenty of rubbish" and "manifest absurdities," so that "no claim need be made for it

as literature." It deserved publication only as a curiosity and because "some of the details were interesting and retained the marks of a master-craftsman" in the form of an occasional "revealing phrase" and some "bright little thumbnail sketches."

Smart's next editor was W.H. Bond, Curator of Manuscripts at the Houghton Library. His edition (1954) struck a slightly more respectful tone. He acknowledged that the poem "is surely one of the great oddities of English poetry," but claimed that his discovery of "the secret of its original structure" made it "somewhat less mad and considerably more revealing." Bond went from the fact that every single versé of the work began either with the word "Let" or the word "For" to the observation that some of the (physically separate) verses were numbered and dated concurrently and could also be connected by verbal links and echoes in an antiphonal pattern. Clearly this called for a new edition with the existing Let/For combinations published *en face,* this time by a University Press (Harvard) with lemma-tized commentary. Although the manuscript was thus partly recuperated for "literature" there was still too much of it for Bond's taste, since what "began as a genuine outpouring of poetical inspiration. . .ended as a device with little purpose beyond recording the passage of time." Only the beginning is "artfully composed," and Smart was guilty of allowing "a conscious work of literature" with "evidence of logical plan" to go from "general" to "complete" deterioration. "No normal man" would have let such a precious work of art become cluttered with a "ridiculous exercise on the alphabet" like that in Fragment C, or degenerate into the "senseless pattern" of the final pages. The manuscript debris that remain exhibits "defects which the most careless author should have corrected in reviewing his work," giving Bond the opportunity to tidy things up by "silently" correcting "many slips of the pen, misspellings, and the like [in order] to present the poem fairly and accurately while playing down such accidentals as might falsely intensify its eccentricity."

With its third appearance in print (1980) a new editor, Karina Williamson, announced that the poem has "been given pride of place" as the first volume in a complete edition of Smart being published by Oxford's Clarendon Press. With her help the canonization and recuperation proceed apace, thanks to the subjunctive ("if Smart had completed the work. . . .if Smart had persisted with his plans") that allows her to speculate about "the whole work" and "the evidence [that] suggests a work whose purpose and plan was evolving in the process of composition." The tidying-up and annotation have continued to expand in this "newly transcribed" edition that now the 32-page poem is spread out over a 143-page volume, making Smart available to all those with $40.00

or access to an academic library. We should all presumably rejoice (*Jubilate* Oxford!) at the result, but that is far from the case, for the process we ordinarily think of as making obscure and difficult texts *accessible* is in fact producing the opposite effect. What is in essence a delightfully *readable* work, one that might seem almost ordinary alongside writers like Stein and Joyce, or even familiar to readers of *Sulfur* or *Temblor,* has been distanced and obscured by three waves of editorializing activity. As respect for Smart and his importance as a poet have increased, respect for his manuscript seems to have decreased. Stead, who thought least of it, nevertheless presented us with a text that "reproduces what Smart wrote, including slips of the pen." Smart's own page numerals are included, separate folio leaves indicated (by Roman numerals) and some variations in dash length suggested. He even uses "sic" in the text where he wants us to be sure something is not his doing. In some ways, then, the snobbish, priggish amateur Stead did a more accurate job of editing than either of his successors, who have instead added to the confusion by not giving us what Smart wrote, while giving use—too often— what he did not write.

The rules of decorum that prevail in an academic print culture require what Joyce called "the rite words in the rote order," and they continue to show aversion for a mode of writing that he characterized as "a stinksome inkenstink, quite puzzonal to the wrottel." Comparable rules of decorum prevail on the interpretive front as well, where even an academic critic like Michael Riffaterre can admit in his *Text Production* that "Explication of texts is really a machine for taming a work, for defusing it by reducing it to habits, to the reigning ideology, to familiar mythology, to something reassuring." The small critical enterprise that is growing up around Smart's work is largely in agreement with Riffaterre's formulation. What little academic "interpretation" of Smart's poem exists occupies a marginal territory in literary studies, where the work can still be regretfully classified by Moira Dearnley as a "grotesque, undeniably insane vision." Predictably the text that has been so often excluded from "literature" because of its failure to conform to the norms of unity, realism and seriousness, is increasingly being brought into the realm of the readable by critics like Harriet Guest who admires its "scientific" sense and "coherent system of belief." But even Smart's best reader to date, Geoffrey Hartman, can find Smart's punning "atrocious." When Geoffrey sees Kit's Cat Jeoffry doing his "duty" in a "dutiful" worship of God, his critic's nose smells doo-doo, and condemns the "near-infantile strain" of Smart's poetic exuberance. Obviously what the critics require is a sanitized, toilet-trained, properly dressed text, designed to meet the reader's textpectations, and this is the role the Oxford edition has been designed to play for the indefinite future.[2]

There are numerous errors in Karina Williamson's edition, some apparently at the level of transcription (e.g. "amonst" for "amongst"), others more likely at the level of setting in type ("Hitttites"); but on the whole she has adequately performed the standard job of normalization and domestication. It is the assumptions and implications of this standard version that concern me here. Williamson's assumption that she knows what Smart "clearly intended" and what his "primary purpose" was constitutes the scholarly editor's first and most essential manoeuvre. Jack Stillinger's highly-regarded and self-proclaimed "Definitive Edition" of Keats starts with an Introduction that gives the most revealing articulation yet of this essential move: "We need not apologize to Keats for this late twentieth-century prying into and behind the texts. His highest 'authorial intention' was to be a famous English poet, and the present edition is one more manifestation of his fulfillment of that intention." It seems that Keats had written in a letter, "I think I shall be among the English Poets after my death," and since he was already familiar with "the standard scholarly edition" as it had developed in dealing with the works of Milton and Spenser and Shakespeare, he knew that "this is what it meant. . .to be 'among the English Poets.'" The self-serving circularity of such reasoning is formidable, and flexible enough to circumscribe even Emily Dickinson (who chose *not* to submit her work for publication). Thomas Johnson, whose radically revisionist edition was the first (1955) to try to translate her sharp, hand-drawn strokes into typographic equivalents, could still maintain that "Quite properly such 'punctuation' should be omitted in later editions, and the spelling and capitalization regularized, as surely she would have expected had the poems been published in her lifetime."

Such small details as punctuation, spelling, abbreviations and the like are thus defined as "accidentals" which the author will have deliberately left to the editor's better judgment. Editorial expert James Thorpe explains: "To return to the accidentals of the author's manuscript would, in these cases, be a puristic recovery of a text which the author himself thought of as incomplete or unperfected: thus, following his own manuscript would result in subverting his intentions." Philip Gaskel is another of the many experts who are eager to honor the author's desire not to appear in public naked or wearing the wrong outfit: "At first glance it might seem that the manuscript will be the obvious choice for copy-text, for it is what the author actually wrote. But does it represent the text as the author wanted it to be read? As far as substantives are concerned. . .it certainly does; but this is hardly the case with the accidentals. Most authors, in fact, expect their spelling, capitalization, and punctuation to be corrected or supplied by the printer, relying on the process to dress the text suitably for publication, implicitly endorsing it. . . .It would normally be wrong, therefore, rigidly to follow the accidentals of the manuscript,

which the author would himself have been prepared—or might have preferred—to discard."[3]

To return now to some specifics of the Oxford edition compared with the manuscript it re-presents, we should first note on the micro-level that there are almost no places where what Smart wrote is unclear. True, we can't tell whether in his view horses should be "clock'd" or "dock'd," and there a few places where the a/o distinction is imperceptible ("Dryas" or "Dryos"?), but the manuscript is on the whole very clearly written and what remains is well preserved [see examples]. The size of the writing can vary greatly, from letter to letter, from line to line, and from page to page. Smart's initial letters are at times ambiguous, his "s" especially tending to be middle-sized, provoking a typographer's dilemma between the lower case or upper. He likes his consonants double (stranggled, ballancing, Wingged, vowell); he uses standard eighteenth-century abbreviations and contractions (w^{ch}, y) and he almost always uses "&" instead of "and." The intensity of punctuation varies, but what there is seems both adequate and consistent. He makes frequent use of variable length marks that might be called "hyphens" or "dashes." There are a few self-corrections and apparent afterthoughts, and fewer deletions. His main structural unit is the verse-line (beginning with either "For. . ." or "Let. . ."). Sometimes he runs lines over when they get too long for his wide pages; at other times he writes smaller and smaller and smaller to keep a line from running over. The page itself can function as a structural unit, and he is consistent in his use of catch-words at the bottoms (obviously always either "Let" or "For") and in his initial numbering of first-pages of different sections.

In her transcription Williamson assumes freedom to add or delete commas, periods, dashes and apostrophes wherever her sense of modern propriety calls for them. She notes these variations at some times but not at others. She incorporates his own corrections without indicating them (again there are a few exceptions) thus erasing the traces of the care Smart took to correct his own work. She does not follow Smart's own line-breaks, even though the line is one of the most basic prosodic features of the poem—perhaps its most important formal unit of spacing and measure—but treats his sentences as squirts of poetic toothpaste that can be divided at any point. Often her added punctuation comes where a line-break in the manuscript might well be performing a similar function for the poet. Smart uses hyphens cleverly for a number of special effects (e.g. "deserted" vs. "desert-ed" or *"quippe qui in—videant"* with the pun on "seeing into" things and "envy"). This means that an editorial line break (or typographical exigency) can be impossible for the reader to distinguish as an *accident* from Smart's *substantive* practice.[4] For example, Smart writes:

> For two creatures the Bull and the Dog prevail in the English.
> For all the words ending in ble are in the creature. Invisi—ble
> Incomprehensi—ble, ineffa—ble, A—ble.
> . . . .
> For can is (canis) is cause & effect a dog.
> For the English is concise & strong. Dog and Bull again.

The Oxford edition gives us:

> *For all the words ending in -ble are in the creature. Invisi-ble, Incom-prehensi-ble, ineffa-ble, A-ble.*

Williamson as editor adds (and notes) the first hyphen ("—ble"), then adds an unacknowledged comma after "Invisible" that Smart perhaps thought unnecessary because it came at his line-end. The typesetter then puts the verse in italic type and adds a second hyphen to "Incom-pre-hensi-ble" which thus becomes intermingled and confused with Smart's own syllabic play. "The clerk-typist determines the linebreaks" *(Tjanting)*.

At another place, where Smart has ironically been thinking about manuscripts falling "into the hands of the inventors of printing," he writes:

For my talent is to give an impression upon words by **punching**, that when the reder casts his eye upon 'em, he takes up the image from the mould w^ch^ I have made

The Oxford edition gives us:

For my talent is to give an impression upon words by punching, that when the reader casts
his eye upon 'em, he takes up the image from the mould which I have made.

In a note Williamson writes: "the word *punching* is in larger script in the MS; the metaphor is from type-founding." Thus at the same time that typography is being used in a grotesquely inappropriate way to mark the physical separation between the Let/For verses (i.e. Roman / *Italic*),[5] its resources are being denied where they are almost explicitly called for. Williamson consistently reads Smart's ampersands as if they were instructions to the printer to print "and," but she ignores here and elsewhere what could well be taken as far more explicit indications of graphemic intentionality.

Another significant feature that typography obliterates is already inscribed *within* Smart's writing, where that writing imitates print, self-consciously introducing the very difference we are concerned with here. In the alphabets that Smart inscribes in *Jubilate Agno* the capital letters are almost painfully labored—large, dark, exquisite formations that exhibit their *letterness* and in so doing become even more conspicuously like icons, signifying in and through their materiality, than like the transparent phonetic signifiers of conventional writing. In this he anticipates an effect Blake was to exploit in works like *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (as it is usually titled in print). In his copperplate version Blake inscribed each word of this title on its own horizontal plane and alternated between the print mimicry of large block-letter type (**THE HEAVEN HELL**) and an exaggerated flowing script (***MARRIAGE OF AND***).

This general insensitivity to the iconic dimension of Smart's work leads to the production of an ugly and irritating book as well as an inconvenient and inaccurate one. Lack of running heads or any indication of Smart's own page breaks makes it difficult to know where we are in the text and impossible to know which page we are on. Notes occupy a large portion of most pages, exceeding 50% of some, and tending to become "one" with the poet's text—assimilated and digested—by being physically present on the same page. Numbers in the margins for every verse crowd the already cramped format even more, and the gratuitous intrusion of extra space and three large asterisks wherever Williamson thinks a major "shift" occurs further distorts Smart's own graphic management of his text. The inclusion of "Two sheets of manuscript" for illustration provides what might have been a nice touch except that the "For" verses are on the *left* instead of the right.

No doubt some of the most vexing physical problems with this edition were beyond Williamson's control. As the editor of a single volume in a standardized series she was probably required to use the same size page for the large folio *Jubilate Agno* that would be used later for the tiny (12.5 cm.) *Hymns for the Amusement of Children.*[6] Even if she had wanted (i.e. if she decided that Smart wanted, or would have wanted) to treat the whole pages of this work as images in their own right, she would have found it difficult if not impossible to do so. Yet it seems clear to me from studying the manuscript that Smart used his large sheets as a field for composition and that many formal properties of his writing were strongly influenced by what we might call "field effects." An adequate transcription should respect the spatial composition of the original, not normalize or regularize and eliminate the very features that give it much of its interest as well as providing indications of its economy of writing.

We might think for comparison of the sculptured effect produced by a page of verse from Pound's *Cantos,* where the page constitutes one of

the poem's formal figures, like an image of permanence working in counterpoint with the unstable process of the text as it emerged over the years in a series of drafts and fragments. Or of Olson, whose practice of "composition by field" reminds us that our word "verse" comes from the Latin *versus,* the turning of a plow at the end of a row. Olson's literal field of composition was a regular 8½ x 11 sheet of typing paper, hence the dimensions of George Butterick's edition of *Maximus* for The University of California Press, in the attempt to reproduce every spatial nuance of the poet who wrote (in the bottom left-hand corner of 21/I.17): "Limits / are what any of us / are inside of." ("Closure is lies. Old Butterick sky: Silliman, *Paradise).* Butterick's faithfulness to Olson is greatly enhanced by Olson's use of the 20th-century poet's writing tool. The typewriter makes it possible for poets to compose directly for the *printed* page, or to work—as Joyce did—with typescripts as a mediating mode between manuscript composition and type setting. Olson made the point in *Projective Verse:* "It is the advantage of the typewriter that, due to its rigidity and its space precisions, it can, for a poet, indicate exactly the breath, the pauses, the suspensions even of syllables, the juxtapositions even of parts of phrases, which he intends." The typewriter has indeed allowed writers to reclaim a great deal of control over the final presentation of their texts, but it has done so by conforming in advance to the parameters of typography. It provides for a "writing" that selects its material stock from the finite order of a keyboard with its discrete and uniform letters separated by precisely controllable uniform units of spacing, in contrast with the irregular flow of manuscript writing. As Marjorie Perloff wrote (apropos of Williams): "Typography, in a case like this, is destiny."

In a typo-teleological world the assumption seems to be that writing aspires to and anticipates the perfection of the printed form that consummates it, erasing the variations and flexibility that are the traces of its manual origin. We might say such "writing" pre-represents, or p/represents print. There may be odd cases, where print seeks to represent manuscript, operating as a symbolic visual object that stands in for an original written artifact (surely Smart's holograph should be one), but they are exceptions. Often—as with Richardson's typographic representation of orthographic disruption in Clarissa's famous "mad papers"—they are fakes.[7] Ordinarily the way a physical letter or mark is made has no relationship to its ability to function as a signifier. This point can be emphasized if we consider Chinese calligraphy, where the direction of brush strokes and the order of laying down the strokes are signifying attributes, so that the "character" includes something like a history of its material genesis.

There is at least one mark in Western alphabetic writing that provides an exception to the rule of the arbitrariness of the material signifier—a

Let Peter rejoice with the MOON FISH who keeps up the life in the water by night.
Let Andrew rejoice with the Whale, who is arrayd in beauteous blue & is a combination of bulky activity.
Let James rejoice with the Shuttle-Fish, who foils his foe by the effusion of his ink.
Let John rejoice with Nautilus who spreads his sail & plies his oar, and the Lord is his pilot.
Let Philip rejoice with Boca which is a fish that can speak.
Let Bartholomew rejoice with the Eel, who is pure in proportion to where he is found & how he is used.
Let Thomas rejoice with the Sword-Fish, whose aim is perpetual & strength insuperable.
Let Matthew rejoice with Uranoscopus, whose eyes are lifted up to God.
Let James the less rejoice with the Haddock, who brought the piece of money for the Lord and Peter.
Let Jude rejoice with the Bream, who is of melancholy from his depth and serenity.
Let Simon rejoice with the Sprat, who is pure and innumerable.
Let Matthias rejoice with the Flying-Fish, who has a part with the birds, and is sublimity in his conceit.
Let Stephen rejoice with Remora — The Lord remove all obstacles to his glory.
Let Paul rejoice with the Seale, who is pleasant & faithfull, like God's good ENGLISHMAN.
Let Agrippa, which is Agricola, rejoice with Elops, who is a choice fish.
Let Joseph rejoice with the Turbut, where capture makes the poor fisher-man sing.
Let Mary rejoice with the Maid — blessed be the name of the immaculate CONCEPTION.
Let John the Baptist rejoice with the Salmon — blessed be the name of the Lord Jesus for infant Baptism.
Let Mark rejoice with the Mullet who is John Bare. God be gracious to him & his family.
Let Barnabas rejoice with the Herring — God be gracious to the Lord's fishery.
Let Cleopas rejoice with the Mackerel who cometh in a shoal after a Leader.
Let Aminadab of the Lord's line rejoice with Murex, who is good and of a precious tincture.
Let Joakim rejoice with the Shad, who is contemned in his abundance.
Let Azor rejoice with the Flounder, who is both of the sea and of the river.
Let Sadoc rejoice with the Bleak, who playeth upon the surfaces in the Sun.
Let Achim rejoice with the Miller's Thumb, who is a delicious morsel for the water fowl.
Let Eliud rejoice with Cinædus, who is a fish yellow all over.
Let Eleazar rejoice with the Grampus, who is a pompous spouter.

Let.

FOR I pray the Lord JESUS that cured the LUNATICK to be merciful to all.
mine brethren and sisters in these houses.
For they work me with their harping-irons, which is a barbarous instrument, because I am more unguarded than others.
For the blessing of God hath been on my epistles, which I have written for the benefit of others.
For I bless God that the CHURCH of ENGLAND is one of the SEVEN on the candlestick of the Lord.
For the ENGLISH TONGUE shall be the language of the WEST.
For I pray Almighty CHRIST to bless the MAGDALEN HOUSE & to forward a National purification.
For I have the blessing of God in the three POINTS of manhood, of the pen, of the sword, & of chivalry.
For I am inquisitive in the Lord, and defend the philosophy of the scripture against vain deceit.
For the nets come down from the eyes of the Lord to fish up men to their salvation.
For I have a greater compass both of mirth and melancholy than another.
For I bless the Lord JESUS [redacted] ever & ever.
For I am redoubled, and redoubled in the Lord, as is THOMAS BECKET my father.
For I have had the grace to GO BACK, which is my blessing unto prosperity.
For I paid for my seal in St PAUL's, when I was six years old [redacted] day.
For I am descended from the Steward of the Island Wilfred [redacted] the name & title of Jesus king of England.
For the poor gentleman is the first object of the Lord's charity & he is the most pitied who hath got the most.
For I am in twelve HARBISTERS, but he that was born of a virgin shall deliver me out of all.
For I am safe, as to my head, from the female dancer and her admirers.
For I pray for CHRISTIAN to give the glory to God, and to keep me adversary at bay.
For I am making to the shore day by day, the Lord Jesus take me.
For I bless the Lord JESUS upon RAMSGATE PIER. The Lord forward the building of harbours.
For I bless the Lord JESUS for his very seed, which is in my body.
For I pray for R and his family, I pray for Mr Becher, and I pray for the Lord JESUS.
For I pray to God for Nore, for the Trinity house, for all light-houses, beacons and buoys.
For though I would that I am not in a dungeon, but am allowed the light of the Sun.
For I pray God for the PYGMIES against their feathered adversaries as a deed of charity.
For I pray God for all Nore, who have defiled themselves in matters inconvenient.
For I pray God be gracious to CORNELIUS MATTHEWS name & connection.

For

5 For A is the beginning of learning and the door of heaven.
For B is a creature busy and bustling.
For C is a sense quick and penetrating.
For D is depth.
For E is eternity — such is the power of the English Letters taken singly.
For F is faith.
For G is God — whom I pray to be gracious to Live more my fellow prisoner.
For H is not a letter, but a spirit — Benedicatur Jesus Christus, sic spiro.m!
For I is identity. God be gracious to Henry Hatsell.
For K is king.
For L is love. God in every language.
For M is music and Hebrew D is the direct figure of God's harp.
For N is new.
For O is open.
For P is power.
For Q is quick.
For R is right.
For S is soul.
For T is truth. God be gracious to Jeremy Pratt and to Harriote his Sister.
For U is unity, and his right name is Clive to work it double.
For W is word.
For X is hope - consisting of two check C - God be gracious to Anne Hope.
For Y is yea. God be gracious to Bennet and his family!
For Z is zeal. [illegible]
For in the education, it is necessary to watch the words, which they pronounce with difficulty, for such are against them in their consequences.
For A is awe, if pronounced full. Stand in awe, and sin not.
For B pronounced in the animal is bey, importing authority.
For C pronounced hard is ke, importing to shut.
For C pronounced full is day.
For E is east particularly when formed like e with his eye.
For E in its secondary meaning is fear.
For E in a secondary sense is good.
For H is heave.
For I is the organ of vision.
For I is knife.
For L is light, and D is the line of beauty.
For M is meet.
For N is nay.
For O is over.
For P is peace.
For Q is quarter.
For R is vain, or thus reign, or thus rein.
For S is save.
For T is take.
For V is veil.
For W is world.
For X beginneth not, but connects and continues.
For Y is young — the Lord direct me in the better way going on in the Fifth year of my jeopardy June ye 17.th N.S. 1760. God be gracious to Dr YOUNG.
For Z is zest. God give us all a relish of our duty.
For Action & Speaking are one according to Gods and the Ancients.
For the approaches of Death are by illumination.
For a man cannot have Publick Spirit, who is void of private benevolence.
For the order of Alemath is first three, second six, third eighteen, fourth fifty four, and then the whole band.
For the order of Shemirith is first ten, second twenty, third thirty & then the whole band.
For the first entrance into Heaven is by complement.
For Flowers can see, and Pope's Carnations know him.
For the devil works upon damps and South and causes agues.
For Ignorance is a sin, because illumination is to be had by prayer.
For me a genius being, but at the plough is a false thought the divine providence will take care of.
For a man's idleness is the fruit of the adversary's diligence.
For diligence is the gift of God, as well as other good things.
For it is a good NOTION to [illegible] one's own eyes ashed in the eyes of fools.
For era in its primitive sense is but a weed amongst corn.
For there is no knowing of times & seasons, in submitting them to God stands the Christian Chronology.
For Jacob's brown sheep were the Golden Fleece.
For Shaving of the face was the invention of the Sophisters to make men look like women.
For God has given us a language of mercy & letter to prevent our despair.
For a wise person is a finer prospect than another creature to compensate his lack.

The Trade I am the object of man's hate
Yet better am I Man a reprobate : : who has the word of promise. For

non-phonetic, purely graphic mark, whose variability is of its essence. The grapheme we call the "dash" has its "meaning" *only* in the way it is made; as its etymology suggests, it is formed by a quick, hurried motion. What it "signifies" (when not reduced as it usually is to the status of "punctuation") is cessation and disjuncture; its function as a rupture in the text's established syntax and voice, in the level of discourse, can approach the metalinguistic.[8] One can *make* a dash in manuscript writing, but can only "represent" a dash on the typewriter or in print. The gestural mark tends to defy adequate typographic representation with its requisite mensuration in ems, and it has had a "bad press" ever since its origins in the eighteenth century. The first authenticated use of the word "dash" to refer to a grapheme is in Swift's *On Poetry* (1733):

> In modern Wit all printed Trash, is
> Set off with num'rous *Breaks*————and *Dashes*———

Although not the virtuoso of the dash that Emily Dickinson was, nor the maniacal graphic comedian Lawrence Stern could be, Smart made frequent and various use of horizontal marks in his manuscript that range from the typographic equivalent of 1/3 em to 8 ems or more. One example must suffice here, from fragment B:

Let Amos rejoice with the Coote————————prepare to meet thy God, O Israel
Let Ephah rejoice with Buprestis, the Lord endue us with temperance & humanity, till every cow have her mate!

Smart has clearly taken pains here (i.e. *there,* in the MS) to make these two lines equal in terms of the space they occupy. Neither this, nor the extremely long "dash" should be ignored by an attempt at typographic representation. Perhaps some day Smart will find a place—if not "among the English poets" in Stillinger's sense, at least in a more accessible form where he can be read in the company of other writers who have chosen to give up literature for writing, and found their signifiers stuffed as full as Christmas stockings.[9] This development will not resolve the issues raised here, but it may help to keep the ideological and practical issues in focus.

Conventional print practice, as a *medium,* is not aesthetically neutral. It permits certain forms to be embodied and resists others, while implicitly and effectively promoting a metaphysical "textuality" whose signifiers are ideally arbitrary and translucent. We look *through* them to find a text uncontaminated by traces of material transmission. It factors by its nature the semantic content of written work and the restriction of "meaning" to the semantically recognizable. These observations are pertinent to the third level of what Frederic Jameson, in *The Political Unconscious,* calls our "horizons of interpretation"—the level of that "ideology of form" that

goes beyond social relations and class antagonisms to locate a text as an expression or reflection of the whole mode of production characteristic of the social formation in which it is produced. We cannot separate these aspects of print-consciousness or print ideology from that peculiar ideologeme (or ideolo*gram)* we call the "book" as it emerged in the print culture of the eighteenth century. Barret Watten *(Total Syntax)* suggests that "Writers often compose with the form of the book in mind; the book is a convention of style. . . .an element of 'major form'" that "as a commodity. . .represents social conventions from which it is not possible to escape." "The question," continues Watten, "is where this form really exists—in the medium of literature, itself built on the production of books, or on the page, in the material book."

One implication of this insight that I have tried to tease out from a consideration of the publishing history of Smart's poem, is that the status of canonized "poet" in the academic sense can be reduced to being a function of the scholarly edition that bears his/her name. Like Keats (in Stillinger's view) Smart cannot be "among the English poets" until—to paraphrase Blake from **THE *MARRIAGE OF* HEAVEN *AND* HELL**—his Unnam'd forms take the form of books and are arranged in libraries. The tension between "literature" and "writing" parallels the tension between "writing" and the "book" in this sense, and it is hard not to be swept into the vortex of a Derridean antimetaphysicalmetaphysics:

> The idea of the book is the idea of a totality, finite or infinite, of the signifier; this totality of the signifier cannot be a totality, unless a totality constituted by the signified preexists it, supervises its inscriptions and its signs, and is independent of it in its ideality. The idea of the book, which always refers to a natural totality, is profoundly alien to the sense of writing. It is the encyclopedic protection of theology and of logocentrism against the disruption of writing, against its aphoristic energy, and. . .against difference in general. *(Of Grammatology)*

When I write "writing" in this context, there is a natural tendency to assume the opposition is between ***hand***-writing (manuscript) and printing, as good and bad media in a melodrama that stars the glamorous Aura Benjamina and Trace Fetishized over against the nasty villain Logo Kantism. But print is itself a physical medium with material signifiers, and most of the issues that are found in the manuscript/typography clash continue to be fought over within the print medium, perhaps nowhere so relentlessly and brilliantly than in the pages of *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. With the advent and widespread use by authors of the typewriter

(and now the computer "wordprocessor") some of the more trivial aspects of these issues should fall away, for the author's writing can now also speak the language of printing.

As they fall away, we can more readily locate the deeper issues that have given form to these local skirmishes. Consider this pronouncement by Ellen Lupton, Curator for the Herb Lubalin Study Center of Design and Typography in New York: The fact that author's manuscripts are not treated as objects "to be produced with verisimilitude" is "a situation caused partly by the ambiguity of manuscripts." Handwritten copy is "often difficult to read; more importantly, even the *author* many have been indecisive. . . .Handwriting is flexible and erratic: changes in spacing, weight, and slant may be random and insignificant, rather like changes of tone in speaking [!]. To set a page of type is to select absolute spaces and characters out of a fixed grid of options: the type case. A typographic word space or capital letter is a solid piece of lead, not a casual gesture of the hand." The opposition posed here is not between two media, though it seems to present itself as such, but rather between two value systems. On the one hand we have the *indecisive-flexible-erratic-random-insignificant-casual;* on the other, blessed with the rhetorical services of Lupton, we have the **ABSOLUTE-FIXED-SOLID.** In spite of this reifying rhetoric of the real, the basic position informing this statement can be seen to be anti-materialist. The "piece of lead" is nothing but a marker pointing elsewhere, worthless without its hypostasized source in a "text." One of the *effects* of typography, when it represents manuscript production, is to eliminate the traces or signs that aesthetic invention is intertwined with material production. By eliminating all traces of false starts, errors and corrections one can produce the effect of being the copy of an ideal object, the dematerialized or immaterial text that endures and survives the contamination of any number of transitory incarnations, even those in type.

Such an incarnation can be studied in the "new" *Ulysses,* edited by Hans Walter Gabler, who tells us that for him "the act of publication is conceived of as an ideal act, to which the edition correlates an ideal text freed of the errors with which *Ulysses* was first published." Gabler seeks "to undo the first edition's textual corruption" and "endeavors to recover the ideal state of development as it was achieved through the traceable processes of composition and revision at the time of the book's publication on 2 February 1922." He tries to achieve this goal by discriminating two different writings: that of Joyce the creative author, and that of Joyce the "scribe" who contributes "copying mistakes" and "errors of transmission" to his own work. The goal Gabler seeks is, in his own terms, an *"imaginary document"* (emphasis added). This "imaginary document" is

what Blake might call "an allegorical abode where existence hath never come" *(EUROPE)*. The doubling of the writing subject into creative author (mind) and bungling scribe (hand) is reminiscent of the ancient master of doubleness, the Jewish Saul who became the Christian Paul who divided the sacred texts in the *letter* that kills and the *spirit* that saves (2 Corinthians 3:6). For Paul the written code is transitory and arbitrary, mere figure or *type*. The spiritual interpretation rescues the "meaning" from the "shadow" of the text, and that meaning is Jesus, the source and referent beyond all language, whose appearance transcends and nullifies all written texts. Paul's mode of interpretation, known as "typological allegory" by biblical scholars, anticipates the type-o-logical allegory of the dematerialized textuality of our own time.

These differences that Paul helped focus as contrast between Jew and Christian, Old and New Testaments, are a historical formulation and reapplication of an opposition that can be found already in the Torah and Midrash, and they have been traced by Freud to a historical moment that preceded even the redaction of those scriptures. In his *Moses and Monotheism* Freud describes what he calls "processes of a similar character in the development of human culture" that must have happened all at the same time as "stages on the way to being human" in a grand "progress in spirituality." In this momentous transition Freud speculates that God was "dematerialized," and "the idea of the soul was born." Both these stages were made possible by the discovery of language and the "new realm of spirituality" opened up by its being a process involving a "movement of air that provided the image of spirituality." Along with these was a fourth process "of similar character" that scored a "victory of spirituality over the senses" by turning from the mother to the father, replacing the matriarchal structure of society by a patriarchal one. This is a different version of the same "step forward in culture, since maternity is proved by the senses whereas paternity is a surmise based on a deduction and a premise."

It may seem fanciful to link such high-flying cultural speculation with the local issues of text-editing, but what Freud celebrates as "Moses's prohibition against worshipping God in a visible form" is directly cognate with a doctrine of signifiers as idols, whose random and superficial properties have no more to do with the "meaning" of a text than the golden calf of the Israelites in Exodus had to do their God. Separation of biological procreation into the significant spiritual paternal role and the insignificant material maternal one is directly comparable to dividing authorship into the creative and the scribal. We seem compelled continuously to rediscover and reenact the dilemma faced by the redactors of Genesis, who could not choose between a God who created by phonetic fiat and a bricoleur God who made things with his hands. Unable to decide—like

Saussure thousands of years later torn between the semiosis of *langue* and hypo*gram* [between *phone*/sound and *gram*/letter]—they gave us both for the firstandfinal word of our archaeology.

In the buginning is the woid,
in the muddle is the sounddance and
thereinofter you're in the unbewised again,
vund vulsyvolsy
[Finnegans Wake]

Notes

1. Although one of the most amazing language phenomena of the century (he died within a few months of Smart) Cruden's career has gone almost without comment. His contribution to the century of the encyclopedia, the dictionary and the alphabet, was the first complete concordance to the Bible (1737, still in print). This project morcelized the holy scriptures into morphemes and alphabetized the pieces, transforming holy writ into "language." Surely he deserves recognition alongside d'Alembert, Diderot, Johnson and Littré as a founder of what Jed Rasula has aptly called *"The Dictionary Kingdom"* [cf. *Tabula Rasa*, title page].
2. For an extended discussion of some of these points as they relate to the editing of Blake, see the Santa Cruz Blake Study review-essay on David Erdman's MLA seal-of-approval edition of *The Complete Poetry and Prose* in *Blake, An Illustrated Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (Summer 1984) pp. 4–31.
3. Thomas Tanzelle provides one of the rare alternative views in this area, suggesting that "If an alteration is thought not to change the meaning (or 'clarify' it, as some editors prefer to say), then what is the purpose of making it? Readers are not normally prevented from understanding a text by oddities and inconsistencies of punctuation and spelling, and when these irregularities are characteristic of the author what is the point of altering them? It is hard to see why editors think they are accomplishing anything by straightening out the details of spelling and punctuation in a letter or journal simply for the sake of tidying up."
4. This is one reason Joyce avoided hyphens like the plague—and why so many editions of his works are plagued with hyphens (left over from arbitrary line-breaks from previous settings) that he would never have tolerated.
5. As grotesque as if the right-hand column in Derrida's *Glas* were italicized and interlineated with the left-hand column. The format of an adequate version of this work should allow us the triple choice of reading *across* (Let. . . .For. . . .) and reading either set of verses *down*.
6. In Volume IV of the Oxford edition, also edited by Williamson, the "conspicuous divergences of style" between the printed sources are resolved by "standardization" because the alternative "confusion of styles. . .would have been misleading as well as aesthetically objectionable."
7. Fake in the sense that there never was an original letter, or fragments of one. They exist only as a "writing effect" created typographically. Richardson ventures to represent the rupture of writing and the book *within* the book, seeming to risk the stability of his whole enterprise, but the disruption is successfully recuperated in order to provide one more authenticity-effect for the other letters.
8. Emily's famous dashes have been variously described as marks on a calendar, the report of a gun, stitches of pain, the tightrope between the sacred and the secular, the

most passionate and indeterminate of punctuation marks, and perhaps the richest punctuation mark in all of American literature. They provoked Geoffrey Hartman to one of his higher flights: "Why does this formal mark, this hyphen with zero meaning, have intraverbal force? Perhaps because it is like the lines between dates on tombstones. It may be an arbitrary sign or it may be openly mimetic. In any case, the decorous proposition that nature is style is radicalized: this elliptical, clipped mark evokes style as nature. That hymen-hyphen persephonates Emily. At every pause, which it institutes, it can remind us of her desire to be a bride of quietness."

9. "This is how we came to free ourselves of literature, that we might resume writing" (Silliman, *Tjanting*). In a sequel to this paper I develop a series of specific procedural and textual comparisons between Smart and other writers including Hopkins, Mallarmé, Stein, Joyce, Khlebnikov, Schwitters, Stevens, Olson, Zukofsky, Derrida, Ponge, Cage, Coolidge, Spicer, Benson, Darragh, Watten, Hejinian, Du Plessis, *OuLiPo* and Bernstein. In many ways the Language Writing work closest to Smart's *Jubilate* is Silliman's *Tjanting*, which even includes cats worthy of Jeoffry's company.

SPENCER SELBY

TWO POEMS

PENULT

The day I began this work
something curious happened.

There befell the consolation
coming to grips within appearance

of those who leave the light
choice by choice, error by error

likened to battle suddenly hurled out
thru a mouth that prohibits reply.

I came here on the pretext
of relation that confronts something

written in the breach approaching
destruction of imperative control.

For what could never be
I put away the state I hold most dear.

I gave myself over and arrived
at a city where each rampart

became a sacrifice surrendered
on the altar of its untranslated form.

For just one minute I stood frozen
between companions sworn to renounce

the same measure of receptivity
that enabled them to animate

and unify the nameless body
which their offspring now accepted

as their favorite rule of law.
If given half a chance I'd put myself

back there in that company,
with the black pole in the white vortex

whose location is not transmissible
by words grown weary and unappreciative

of my effort to understand the life
held captive behind my current mirror.

I'd speak with all the characters,
observe every function and use

deceptive logic no longer
sounding worried at my expense.

Before you could say good-bye
I'd find myself in immediate touch

with the rupture of presence that brings
a danger I'm unwilling to overcome.

Whenever I think about such scale
my movement spells sabotage

without modifying a single word.
A consequent question stops cold,

thrown back at a hostile audience
when nothing obvious occurs.

A thirst for knowledge denied
between the separate rays of light

illuminating memory wrung from doctrines
of a future I've no time left to avoid.

Believe me when I say I think about
this problem every chance I get.

The light and the dark
the high the middle and the low

won't relieve a distinction
which tosses me back and forth

when I'm standing on a threshold
on the outskirts of original surprise.

That's not the way things happen.
That's not the way at all.

TRACTOR FEED

On the page I've written
how much demanding fortune
always fails to include.

I see a language
which stares down the borders
that build up opinions made over

thru man's propitiated resolve.
The difference I remember
is striking some new obstacle

for the purpose of exploring
blankets spread across the future
colloquial slang or use.

A living aspect must be qualified
by no other reason ground down
upon a context so concrete.

Chance encounters look the wrong way
at my livelihood of work and play
made timely as a subject

in its present alternative role.
Continuity of prejudice
requires antagonism toward my effort

to understand what is happening
with a short-term hammer
that is pounding below my reach.

I say whatever exists is a place
encouraged by words to bring
the end of a quieter day's response.

All knowledge under my discussion
excretes an atmosphere of hunger
in which sober talk is impossible.

I turn my back on various names
that splash their tools and methods
across the endless country

where I teach myself to live.
Construction of my value
shapes a challenge by the minute

that arouses sufficient material
to fill a very large house.
By the time the house is finished

every inch of visible wood
might be commensurate
with one unfamiliar experience.

Each room is quickly surrounded
by the map I've drawn
to give its premise an active design.

Light bulbs in every direction
appreciate twice the usual
pressure applied against my argument.

Black clouds gather in the evening sky.
Bodies fall silent in their foundation.
Experts stop what they are doing

long enough to open both eyes
on the function of a ceiling
now excluded from my system for good.

CYNTHIA NADELMAN

PAMELA WYE: INKLINGS AND OTHER NOTIONS

Life is not easy for Pamela Wye. To hear her tell it, a trip to the grocery store for chocolate chips nearly lands her at the police station. By the time she's compared every recipe on the back of every chip package, a squad of security guards has gathered around her, and things are looking dim. This is important. Key word, that. Something else that happens at the grocery store is appropriation, and that also takes time. For instance, Wye examines all the drawings on packages in order to leave with a few choice examples, such as the corn-woman on Argo corn starch, or the Tropicana orange girl. These get incorporated in paintings and drawings. Once, commemorating a cleaning binge that took place after she finished an essay (writing does this to her; painting and drawing apparently don't), Wye isolated the line drawing on the Brillo box that shows a woman holding aloft a sparkling Paul Revere or Farberware saucepan. Thus did her own pan now shine. She partially encircled that drawing in drawn laurels of her own. Clearly, her heroes are not so much Warhol, or Meyer Vaisman, or Brillo, but an anonymous illustrator and an invisible (key word, that) subject, whose hands—wedding ring and all—have wrought miracles Wye can relate to.

The fact is that Wye, who paints, draws, and writes, has been drawing a great deal for the past few years. She has stated that drawing is a kind of mediation between writing and painting, and recently she has been combining all of these methods in paintings, including Polyurethaned manuscript pages of her essays and stories. The paintings, though, are a recent re-development.

Following on the success of her high-keyed and high-colored psycho-social and -sexual paintings that were a welcome element in the first efflorescence of the East Village in the mid-1980s, Wye cut back and began to concentrate on drawing. She curated a drawing show called "Odd and Intense," which included work by Louise Bourgeois, Lee Bontecou, Mary Bauermeister and Mary Beth Edelson, among others. A few months later she showed the drawings she had been working on, calling them "Inklings."

Like her research projects, which are invariably, perhaps obsessively, well-prepared labors of love that become painful yet entirely worthwhile at the writing stage, her drawings in ink or pencil are rich and complete

worlds unto themselves. In drawings she did while teaching at the Kansas City Art Institute in 1986, there are symbolic allusions to a landscape of wide-open spaces interrupted by occasional topographic features, such as a tree, pyramidal hills and a dry creek bed. These drawings are dry, like the weather when she was there, but one of them has a series of rococo doodles referring obliquely to the pressures Wye was feeling as a teacher of eager young students. More and more, the drawings have become sensitive barometers of Wye's thoughts and feelings and ideas, not a little tempered by surrealism and a bizarre sense of humor, largely informed by the strange and difficult events of daily life. Little faces—sad, worried, afraid—populate the drawings, often embellished by decorative or symbolic flourishes signifying larger forces afoot. Sometimes there are faces within faces. One is reminded of Jonathan Borofsky one moment, the 1930s Polish writer/artist Bruno Schulz, the next.

There are obsessions with human organs, human hair, and, of course, words. In *Conundrum*, a woman's hairdo meanders into her lungs, while *Headful* features a face surrounded by intestines—all atop four little legs. Ink washes swirl around in some of these drawings, creating vortices and claustrophobia. In a fit of frustration, Wye held *Getting To Know the Map of South America* under the shower, which resulted in that drawing's deep, liquidy look. Dictionary illustrations and drawings of Wye's own that might be taken for medical illustrations are thrown into her work. The artist's own baroque line wanders in convoluted and beautiful and ultimately complete configurations, often performing alone in isolated sections of a drawing. Phrases and words are merged with images, as in the drawing, *Flea/Flee*, where the words are accompanied by the drawn insect. Illegible words appear in this drawing, as well, filling the top of the page and eventually floating off the edge. In *Are You a Fish Out of Water?*, the question is presented almost as a rebus, with Saul Steinbergian overtones. A rather uproarious drawing, full of washes and faces, has this phrase running across the bottom: "left to right right to life left to die right to die left-right left-right." She forgot "right to write," a principle Wye has made her own as an artist.

Since writing the essay for her "Odd and Intense" show, Wye has studied and written about a number of artists with whom she seems in some way to identify, if not through their art, then through their place in the art world or art history. Among these artists are Florine Stettheimer, Camille Claudel, Mary Bauermeister, Yayoi Kusama, Adolf Wölfli, Remedios Varo and Nancy Spero. If not actually classified as insane, or retired from the art world, these artists have all been victims of what Wye calls "invisibility" and "unimportance," concepts she has eloquently and cogently discussed in her essays. While she has clearly been inspired by some of these artists' art—much of it a kind of private, not bombastic yet sometimes deeply disturbing or moving expression—she is also mesmerized by their fates.

The situation is best explained in her own words (taken from her essay on Florine Stettheimer):

> . . .did time, once it grasped the essential nature of the artist and the art, take off on its own, elaborating their future from an initial soil impregnated with their eccentricity and independence, and out of which their invisibility took seed and grew and grew, out of the artist's reach? This is a terrifying fate to consider for those with an affinity to this independent sensibility. To be forgotten, misunderstood, ignored, or unjustly left out. What could be worse? Yet it is precisely these qualities, this emptiness, hole, lacuna, and need, which have the power to attract and fascinate.[1]

Later, she delivers a damning description of "importance" and the way it can "shrink to invisibility art which is inconvenient, marginal, or eccentric by simply and persistently ignoring it."[2]

Wye's most recent drawings are done on narrow, vertical sheets, two of which are then placed end to end, to become even narrower in overall profile. One reads them somewhat the way one reads Chinese paintings, though with less of a program. Two of these, *Portable Breasts In All Sizes* and *If Breasts Had Eyes*, are somewhat self-explanatory. The first is a sort of catalogue of breast sizes and shapes with strings attached (literally). Finely detailed yet ultimately Rorschachian flowers with empty or dark centers somewhat in the style of Lee Bontecou adorn this drawing, as well as other recent drawings. The breasts are done in pencil, which lends a softness and translucency, in contrast to the hardness and permanence of the ink drawings in all their eccentricity. Elsewhere in this new format, Wye has repeatedly typed a poem, accompanied by flowers, then hand-written and partially erased a story about her cat.

This is not art brut, but a sophisticated sensibility showing how complex and able people can have tough rows to hoe in living out their lives. It begins with those trips to the supermarket and spills over into everything else. One thing Wye neglected to say about "important" artists is that they are only written about by important writers, as she should know, the one lending import to the other. The challenge is to aspire, with the artist, to the opposing state. Peel back your visibility, artist. Discover your unimportance. For Pamela Wye, the search is on.

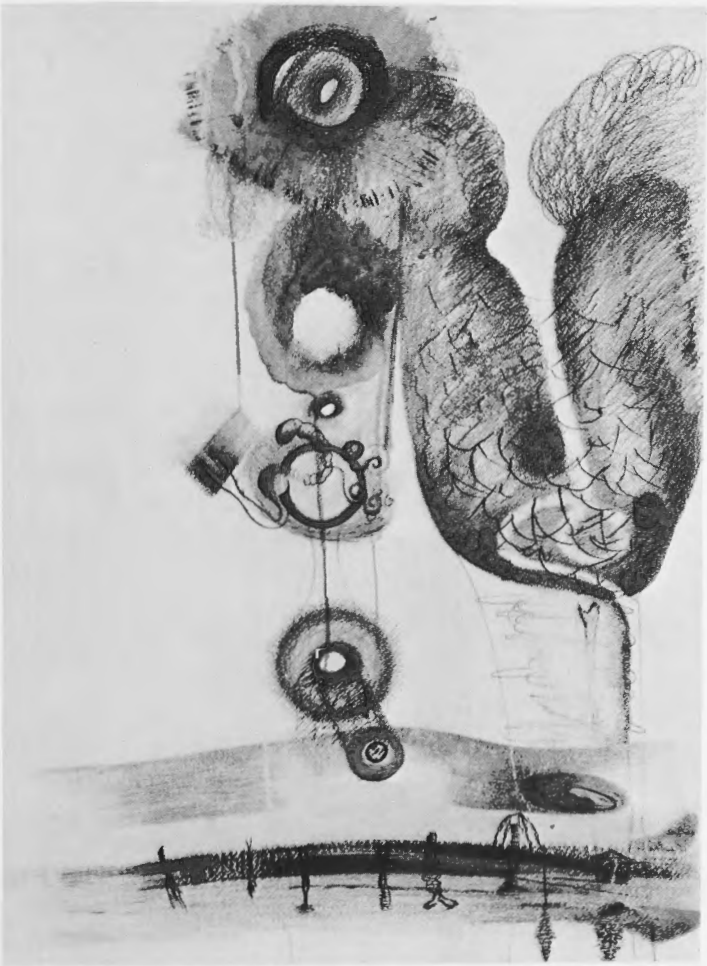
Notes

1. Pamela Wye, "Florine Stettheimer: Eccentric Power, Invisible Tradition," *Meaning*, Vol. 3, May 1988, p. 4.
2. *ibid.*, p. 5.

PAMELA WYE

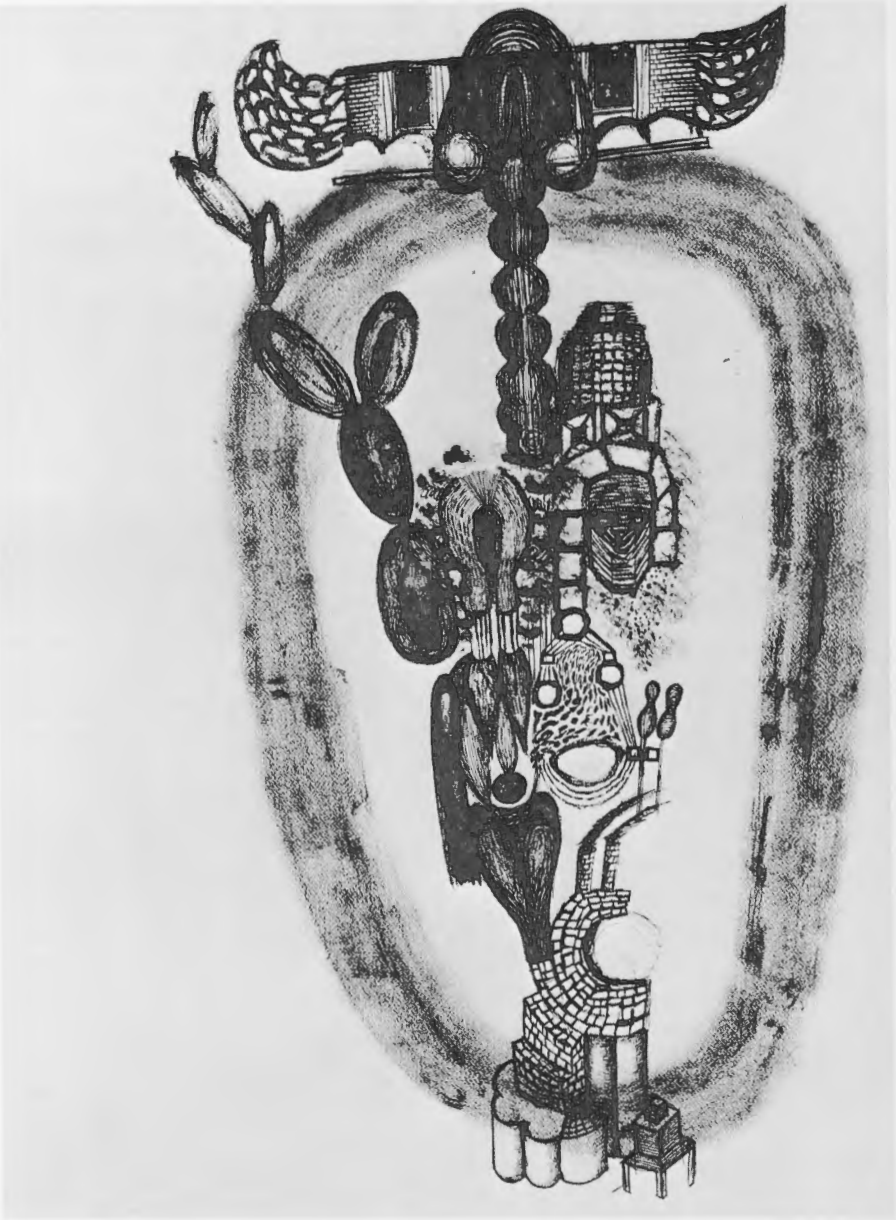
SIX WORKS

(Photographed by Adam Reich)



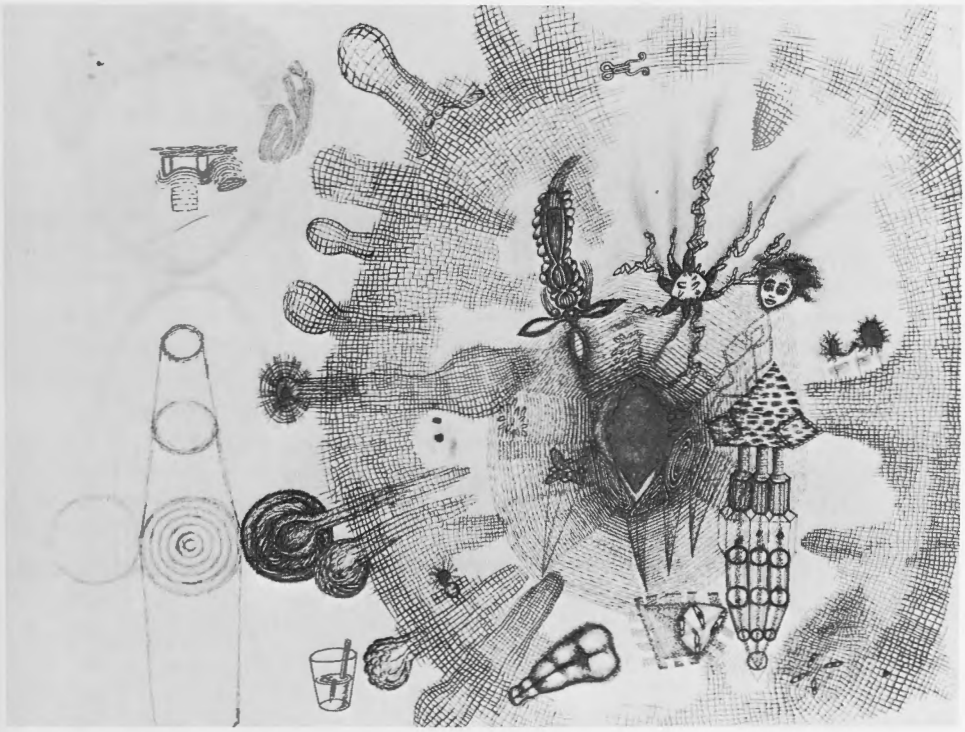
IS SHE STILL COLLECTING ROOSTERS

1989, Ink, Pencil, Acrylic on Paper, 30" x 22"



RING AROUND THE TOTEM

1985, Ink on Paper, 30" x 22"

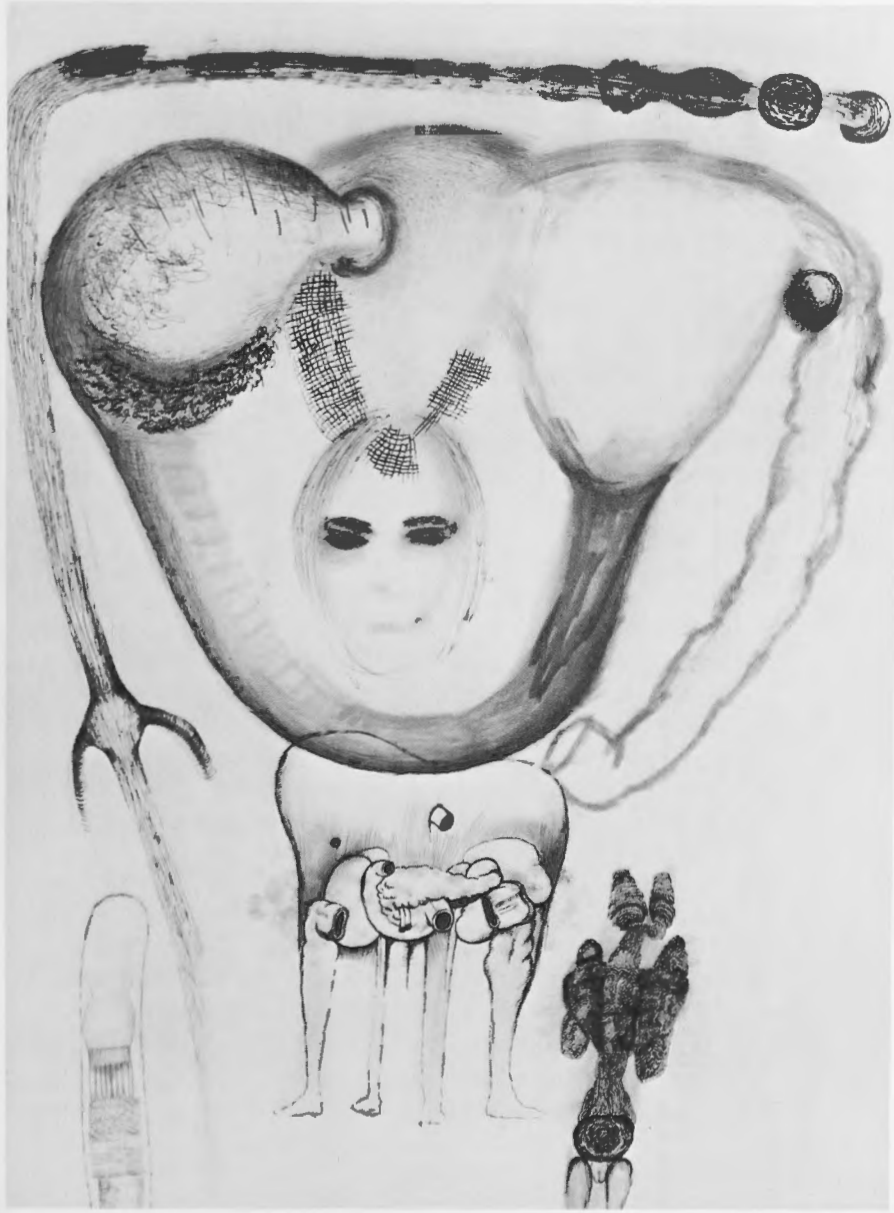


WEB

1986, Ink on Paper, 20" x 26"

GETTING TO KNOW THE MAP OF SOUTH AMERICA

1986, Ink, Letraset on Paper, 20" x 26"



A HEADFUL

1986, Ink, Ballpoint on Paper, 30" x 22"

LEFT HANGING

1985, Ink on Paper, 30" x 22"

ELAINE EQUI

FOUR POEMS

GENERIC

Who is
that statue
a state of?

Why it could
be anyone.

Shifting thru
anathema's
litter

generic
as a puff
of flag

or the bullet-headed
beam
of an apple.

DESTINATIONS

1.

A hand
leafs through
autumn

with a logic
that shines
like oxblood.

Every morning
I don't hear it

the absence
behind the bird.

Nudging the frame.
Singing its head off.

2.

Your letter
is full of energy

as though you were
inside a color
a whole flock of them

but I slept
on the day
I was born

and see sleep
as others see the world.

A lamp filled with
the oil of dreams

hisses, stone chatter.

DREADLOCKS

for Jean-Michel Basquiat

All the colors
wired together
so when he
combs his hair
the train explodes.

APRIL BERNARD

FOUR PSALMS

PSALM OF THE CITY-DWELLER GONE HOME

There must be as many windows as possible, while the long
white ghost
floats from a hanger looped to the shade

Rumblings in the stars, a clanging that preceded this slate
vault of cloud, Arcturus palsied, and tonight the moon will be
blotted
somewhere west of here

I've been looking for faces in the snow, the spit of ice
from ghost grass, the spangles of ice from the moon

The things that come out of my mouth

No longer trusting to memory, the man with rags to bind his feet
springs lightly as a deer across the shaggy meadow

The landscape will not yield to winter's plow: The men I lusted
after,
not knowing where lust would take me, or how

Mechanical rumblings of the stars that shift in the bed of black;
and in their cold inadequate light we are urged to be afraid

They illume the streets, lamps holding new gases under glass,
indicate hideous bright new tones, creep up the meadow

Mice, wretched with winter, creep lightly as deer about the attic

If I wandered with bloody feet on this bitter night and asked for
God,
I would be afraid to find him

That sheet waved perpendicular by ice and wind, though there is
no wind
across the bitter skin of the moon

Older now and tired, looking for God, as for my bitterest enemy

PSALM OF THE CANAL-DWELLER

What difference can there be with, say, a long large gun of
uncertain name and number, slung over the shoulder like a
schoolbag

This is how we make it up as we go along

All those uniforms lying empty on the mudbank, their empty
grey legs
staining dark brown with the coming tide

There was the midnight hush and a rope squeaking against its
mooring;
there was the choking sound of an engine failing

While the palm leaves clattered like plastic knives and someone
closed his eyes, trying so hard to piece it together as if it were a
story

Instead of what it is, a sequence out of sequence, the charnel
smell of mud in the morning as the crabs with claws
that look like paper wings flutter, flutter

PSALM OF THE SPIT-DWELLER

The wavelets hot against my toes, the distinctive smell: of grou-
per,
washing bloated carcasses along the sand

Where the log has charred from beach fires, where the grass
has scorched from sun, and the dogs that trotted down the line
together and they said last year they ate a baby

White fish jump frantic into the air, white terns dive frantic
upon them, lozenges of white deserting their elements

Come down upon me now, o wrath implicit in that wall of black
that looms quickly, almost comically, from the north:
But now it is like a lid closing over the greasy snowy blue-white
eye
of the sky: The lid will close forever

But the wrath is plain, unamused, and this is apparent once it
has passed,
and the spit is two miles shorter than two hours ago

Meanwhile, crazy cottages stuck like bird houses above the
shifting sand
tell their own Biblical comedy, as it will
someday also please the storm to laugh out loud

PSALM OF THE SURPRISED

The world lay warm and sugared at waking,
as the head of a child leans back into a big hand, learning to
float

So shall we now lean, back into the forgiveness of strangers,
the blue and red serapes moving bodiless past cafe railings

Warm sun that plucks the hair of sheep and the skins of pigs
from our backs, leaving us clothed in dust motes and their
conveyances,
beams

A pair of miniature women from across the river
arrived clutching portents in a bag they would not open

Wipe the salted, grateful, ignoble tear from the triangle of the
eye;
finger the beads of hematite, tell the new words,
a prayer for every step across the cobblestones rounded and
polished
like metal

CHARLES BERNSTEIN

REVEAL CODES

It is often said that the bladder is an unreliable
witness. I've felt that way myself coming back
from a sluggishly encumbered day at the computer
bank. "They clammed up like so many turtles
in overdrive"—but only if you didn't get to know
their Mercurial propulsions. There's a version
that says quell the branches before you braid
or at least unload the interfusing hot buttons. Don't
know much about chopped wax either, loop
the reliquary, some cross-valent comet coming at
50,000 kilobytes per minute per mention, I left
the rack at the store but recalled the combination
to the cross, "he would suck up to
an octopus if he thought it would strangle somebody
for him," no pork barrel just juiced petunias. . .

It was one of those almost unfamiliar
sections of LA, just beyond the tar
pits, where you could get steak
& eggs for breakfast for under ten
& change. I wasn't
quite a regular but they knew me well enough
to bring the order without asking
too many questions. It was
a dive I went to to get my mind off work, my attention
Intermittent Diffuse.
with just enough juice
to register the scene at the end table
by the picture of Hydra.

Ripping through the water like it was so much
Swiss cheese

"The only thing Swiss about you is the baloney!"

Dear Mr. Charles,

I wish and pray this letter finds you
in the best of health and cheers. May I
introduce myself as a missionary priest
working for North East India with its
thousands of downtrodden people, suffering
from the pangs of poverty, illiteracy
diseases, etc. Hence in their name this
begging letter to you for any little help.

So many innocent and poor children
are to be fed, educated, and looked
after. Timely aids for emergency needs
give us tensions in distress we
have no other way than to make
appeal in folded hands to kind
hearted people.

Fr. Pallatty M.
Madras 600 008

Dried ice or crunched innuendo, on your toes then on your knees. To capitalize Despair—that was the old way; to capitalize on despair, who promises an aspiring future in piece goods. . .The boat found the bay but the ocean had turned to a symphony of suction. *So long sweet tuna, so long gefilte fish.* The only true traditions the ones we invent to vent the spleen of the inconsolable loss of history's ambient diffusion and victory's unsparing parry. Witless in the rain, sober in the dew. . .

Or more due than ever done, when debts
Soak the morning and regrets eventide

My name is Necromancer
My sister calls me Still
I'm widely known as Cast Away
've trouble with my Trill

Yet despite the disintegration of his personality, the foolishness of his actions, his excessive drunkenness and incurable extravagance, Goldsmith was, and is, a great man—a man of rare talents that border on genius, one of the finest natural writers in the English language.

For Blake's art is ornamental
& rhetorical, not organic &
formal.

Slip & slide
pop 'n' fizz
blink and whine
drop, spin

There hangs the fade, there the woolen shoes.
The roof has swoops—
two fools under one hood, alarmed to the teeth
one with an eye on the sail
other with ear to the—.

Where the carcass is, there
the crow flies.

Swarming around the bandshell
waiting for the buzz saw
or Buick Pompadour convertible
coupe or any so-called doze-proof
buffet

Or, to put it more bluntly, no gain
no pain. As if no pain wasn't
pain enough.

This keys the cue when the overlay
is toggled. "Hot keys"—i.e.
combinations you press to access
a resident, or underlying, program, as
"control" and "home," "mother" and "blanket,"
"disguise" and "revenge."

As in a lifeguard's better than
no guard. As if
you could guard life
without blanking it out.

My friend Polly Vocal called the other
day just to say hello. I decided not
to pick up and returned the call
to the machine on her other number.

Go On Get Down

"Do they have a bar here?"

Short stabs or quick hits or is there
an exit & is it near the "exit" sign?

Is the Pope Polish? Does 3 + 5 equal 5 + 3?
Is Lincoln buried in Grant's tomb? Is
the South Bronx a WASP enclave? Will this
burn at Fahrenheit 451? Is Napoleon the President
of the Bahamas? Is Communism finished? Do
hearts break when you don't touch them?
Are the rich getting richer or are you just
glad to see me?

"I didn't give it to you with any sand so
why do you give it to me with sand?"

"Well, Blanche, I just brought the egg over here
because the recipe says to separate two eggs."

LET'S CALL THE POLICE!

"Let's call the Swedish delegation!"

Call me irresistible or call me unreliable
but don't call me I'll call you

He showed a malignant unwillingness to differentiate
frames suggesting an underlying refusal

to distinguish between performative, substantive, substantive-performative, and perfermo-substantive utterances.

"I thought utterances were for cows"

"You think you're big but in reality you're very little"

"In reality" I don't exist though I will recently have moved to Buffalo.

Elbow or buckled philodendron

"It's just hard it's not like you're gonna get killed"

First there is the build up & then the fizz (fix).
In Utopia the story will never end.

—"Or begin"

"Yah but a softball is still hard"

Or if this followed the other, that this? This that other, the followed this if, or.

Just don't say it like you mean it

You can't substitute *heating oil* for 'moral panic'

You get the hose, I got the biscuits

Look! Look!

I'm eternally attentive but nowhere sentient

"Just tell the snake, 'NO'!"

Fluidly floral or floridly fluid

Butcha better belch

"No they're not fighting it's real play"

She doesn't give up she doesn't even try!

Flummoxed or flunked or flushed or refrigerator

Decals make the man much the way oilcloth
makes the kitchen. "Oilcloth" being an old-
fashioned way of saying *linoleum*, "decals"
being an oblique way of suggesting *models for.*

"I'm hungry and want someone to greet."

If sand'll get you shore, sad'll get
you exactly nowhere.

"But I can't help it"

"Then I can't help you"

(As if volition were voluntary)

You have to occupy yourself sometimes, draw
on your own resources.

As if *you* had any!

My inner resources are overdrawn, in the
sense of interest due & exaggerated, which go
together like an ant and a pineapple,
a zebra and polystyrene wrap, petunia
and DOS 4.01.

DOS, DOS and not a drop to drink

DOS, DOS don't you know the road

what I've never understood about fashion is that
if you buy a new swimsuit (what we used to call
bathing suit) every summer what do you do with
the old trunks?

Ou sont les bikinis *d'antan?*

"Yeah yeah" [negative double positive]

MAKE MAYONNAISE NOT MUNITIONS

DISPOSSESS THE RICH NOT THE POOR

Save gas, stay at home.
Save electricity, sleep more.
Improve your mind, get a vasectomy.

No I'm not hostile, just unhappy.

No I'm not unhappy, just hostile.

I mean, *hospitable*. . .I mean I've been
a little grumpy the past few decades

Harder for a rich man to read a poem than
for a hippopotamus to sing bell canto.

Preposterous!

Para(pa)posterous.

Indubitably, indubitablier, emergency intubation
—But then you've probably never heard Rataxes sing!

Not only that, either—when two bits ain't
worth a dime, you might as well swap those
Swamis for some canned fish

No, I'm not sarcastic, just unsettled, like
images of the Indians trouble my sleep, like
we settled altogether too much too fast &
have to throw out our backs retracing our
steps

There is a madness to their method: Take no
prisoners, pensioners

For to dissect is to delight in the
sentient; all else is so much hocus
pocus, ring-a-leveos of repression and
triplebind, culpable blindness to what
is before our touch. Read to redress,
disguise as promise—not to submit.
Hollow words with a ring of truth,
signet of sorrow. Not to reprimand is
to be remanded to the custody of those
escaped the tide of moral pull:
accumulation beyond the wildest needs
of child or woman or man—this is
the first sin. Our jailers
are our constipating sense of self—
not that madmen claim many kin.
Rue or be ruled or take a ruler
to the wind to measure the gravity
that locates us surely as the morning
falls, whether or not we get up.

Or else—

wake me for meals

GEORGE OPPEN

"THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE ASTONISHED"

(Selections from the Working Papers, edited by Rachel Blau DuPlessis)

This is the last in a series of three selections made for *Sulfur* by this editor from the Oppen papers at The Archive for New Poetry, Mandeville Department of Special Collections, Library of the University of California, San Diego (UCSD). The other two were in *Sulfur* 25 and 26. These pages offer some of Oppen's continuous and provocative thinking on poetics. Indeed, the majority of the extensive working papers and bound daybooks in the Archive may be said to be about poetics: as Oppen said here, he was "trying to think about an adequate art."

As with any of the prior publications of selections from Oppen's writing, the arrangement of the fragments, or (in this case) the pages is entirely the responsibility of the various editors, since no indication has (to date) been found of any scheme or plans into which any of this writing was to go. In this particular case, the page seems to be a unit of meaning, but these are hardly the only pages of which this may be said. In other cases, the writing is more fragmentary and aphoristic. Some of the working papers very evidently go into poems, or are working towards poems. There is also, as I mentioned in an earlier *Sulfur*, a sense of some directly autobiographical writing: an attempt to tell, although not to narrate, his life. (This impulse probably stands in a complex relation to Mary Oppen's *Meaning a Life.)* But most of the pages I have selected here (as well as the aphorisms and materials selected by Davidson, Anderson and Young in other journals) seem to have been done for the sake of the praxis itself, a practice of commentary, scrutiny, judgment, and wonder that continued to support and buoy Oppen's writing of poetry, that stood in a dialectical relation to it. The practice of poetry, and the practice of poetics (in working papers and in his letters) are two strands of one enterprise. "The Philosophy of the Astonished," a phrase found on one of these pages, seemed an appropriate way to summarize one central aspect of Oppen's poetics. Therefore I have isolated it as a title.

To assist *Sulfur* readers in seeing the units of Oppen's thought, the beginning of each page is indicated by my mark: ++. Series, Box, and Folder

numbers are given following each page; when these identificatory marks are the same, as occurs in a few cases here, it simply means that these pages are found in the same folder, along with perhaps fifty other separate sheets. Oppen's handwriting is difficult to read; these pages are mainly typed, with a few autograph statements which I have translated as best I could, asking the help of Linda Oppen Mourelatos. Punctuation, or lack of same, various textual marks (like Oppen's circling or boxing certain statements), and the expressive use of white space have been given as Oppen presented them, or in near facsimile. But errors in spelling and typographical errors have been corrected. Again, I want to express my deep gratitude to the Archive and its staff, and to Linda Oppen Mourelatos for permission to publish these materials. This work, and the prior publications, were supported in part by a Travel to Collections Grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

++ THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE ASTONISHED

I do not care for "systems," what I read is the philosophy of the astonished

Not an opinion: an opinion is a rearrangement of established concepts The Poem starts before anything was said

X X X
In weak poetry too many things happen to illustrate a point
Whereas it must be that what happens *is* the point
X X X X

I no longer believe in revolutions—having seen some as they—

therefore I cannot talk of ethics. an ethic.

the senses must be appealed to somewhere in every test of truth.

I think I tend not to doubt—I am unable to doubt—what I experience

—but so are the, the 'mystics' They find ways to experience other things.

But Louis, *you* think I haven't earned the poetry? It seems to me that I have.

My own opinion is that I have earned the poetry

UCSD 16, 16, 8

++ 1 The suffering of the masses cannot in itself create revolution. Revolutions occur only when the ruling class is unable to continue to rule in the old way, when it is forced to move the masses into action, to disrupt their habits and their monumental inertia—This from Lenin, tho the quotation is inexact.

2 The quality of the Game is involved in the present situation as a minor factor: of the three candidates none is able to rule the country, to administer the country The game of ambition has finally resulted in this. One had never quite understood why it did not produce this situation long ago. For some reason it did not, but it has now

3 Moreover: none of the groups, Parties, coalitions knows how to do what it declares to be its program The rightists cannot stop 'crime in the streets' nor can they win the colonial wars. The liberals cannot satisfy the demands of either the 'rioters' or the 'criminals' in the streets, nor can they end the colonial wars or the threat of major wars.

4 As for the radicals, Eastern Europe makes clear that they rapidly approach our situation

5 I.F. Stone ends a long and complex article with the simple sentence: I don't know what to do

Simply: the liberal program won't work. It is *forcing* the workers and lower middle class into the right wing And of course 'Disarmament' and such have no meaning

Simply: the right wing program won't work. People will fight and continue to fight

Simply: the radical program provides nothing for anyone

Simply: we have not begun to think, or hardly begun to think about . . . . .

. . .

[The question 'about what?' is, at this juncture, the beginning of thought]

UCSD 16, 15, 3

++ 2 if one were actually entrusted with making a program :

There are undoubtedly millions of hungry children in the world. We find the fact more and more intolerable.

It is clear enough that money is required to feed these children: it would cost money. As consumers, we encounter the thing in that way. It is far from the basic aspect, which is: to feed those children requires work

At the same time that we find the fact of starving children intolerable, we complain and rightly of the rat-race————

the liberal position is most opposed to permitting the children to go hungry, and most opposed to increasing the workload————

there are areas in which, like children, we cannot hear that a compromise is made—that some children will be fed but that we have decided who we will not feed—or the number we will not feed

It is intolerable to say so————, WOULD every man agree to get up an hour earlier every working day, and quit work an hour later, if it were put to him in that way, in order to ——— etc. This for a 'limited time' the limited time, however, comprising his entire life

Perhaps he would Some would. The question is 'MUST' he ?

If he does not wish to devote his entire life to a job, do we not find ourselves very much in sympathy with him————?

IS IT AT ALL POSSIBLE TO DISCUSS SUCH MATTERS CLEARLY????

It is not/

((a political morality of averages, statistics—of gesture.))
We dare not say anything clearly

UCSD 16, 16, 1

++ 'the poor' (above) meaning: those whose actions, as individuals, have no effect. Therefore there is nothing to see, nothing to watch

((as for specific program whether this society should be smashed, saved, altered I am not sure that society has any role to play in the problems we are or seem to be unable to avoid—

Leave out all the little niggling practicalities which are the argument of mild conservatism—assume that food will grow itself and deliver itself to everyone's door and shelter will grow in the fields etc etc etc : then: What would we have society or civilization DO for people

is there anything 'it'—the form of the social organization CAN do for the people we know best and think about ?

> Some attempt to glimpse without clichés or the loyalties of the studios and the little magazines that other—other what? other world? other posture?—other kind of exposure to a slightly other world, I guess

I am not abandoning 'art'—I am trying to think about an adequate art

UCSD 16, 16, 1

++ belief also *happens* conviction happens there is not a free choice I speak only of my experience, and of course therefore above all of my emotions Perhaps only of my emotions but there appears again and again the word *thing* the profound word, the impenetrable word, the final word

relation between people and objects

The Art
home from the sea the summer
seas the sailing and a bug

walks on the kitchen
table dragon flies butterflies over
the grass a groping
down a going

down the words
rise

afresh afresh the base the desolate there

is the transforming for the world is in fact

made of

———

'bad taste'—to find oneself in the middle of a silly story about yourself

—to mix with the elements around him

the size of solitude

and yet to exist for one's own sake
(middle-brow, means not to exist for one's own sake))

—the ideas they choose and hunt for they judge by their therapeutic value—a simple and childish test

the little flash-light that blinds one—better to risk falling downstairs, better to risk colliding with a tree

the murdered, the murdered
these brothers
these sisters

pull us down and we weep

politics saves lives and throws them away ??

UCSD 16, 16, 8

++ The 'emotionalists: thought also possesses great energy: one must say, emotion, which is e motion, motion outward, action outward not the sensations (as we imagine them) of the foetus or the mindless organism

what is not love has no value (a truism)

Plato's fixed eye———metaphor of the eye which cannot be moved but by turning the whole body: it is possible to call something to a friend's attention, it is not possible to put sight into a blind eye

'becoming and perishing'—this does not trouble me I think of process

I used the word 'world' or 'universe' to mean all that there is because I need some word with this meaning The word God must mean what these words mean, and one easily may use the wôrd God, or it must mean less than that. In which case I do not know how to use the word

All the elements of this wall, any wall, have come from eternity

The meaning of *Job* That [here] is a power in a statement which is true (the meaning of the poem in [is?] that God answered.) a statement which is true is related, insofar as it is true to god

O these are the great things!

only one point of honesty is required to find everything (One moment of sincerity threatens to disclose everything)

O these are the great things, it seems for a moment as if one point of honesty found everything

UCSD 16, 15, 2

++ The poem as process of thought. The poem as process of thought, process of perception, the poem as achievement, first of all, for the poet. The primacy of the nominative, which Hegel spoke of, the primacy of subject. ***Revelation in the nominative: there can be no predicate of revelation.*** It is never which is which

which does not guarantee paradise. Paradise of the real, I don't know that it can be offered. I can speak of happiness— Which occurs. And is, in that it occurs, awesome

the point of the word *occurs,* here, is that it is awesome

The display of greed—How can one get closer to despair than the proposition that happiness and dignity consists of the opportunity to consume other people's labor

—a blurring of the distinction between subjective and objective—
There has been no instant in my life when such a blurring was possible for me

for one thing: too much a carpenter: I know what a blue guitar is made *of*

They use up more than they contribute—use up the emotionalism attached to certain words. Leaving devastation behind them, a widening devastation, perhaps in time the devastation of the soil

The world reproduced in 'interior space, and in the same act, consciousness is produced An act, most literally, of the imagination.

Terrified to recognize the infinity of the world—and how could they not be— and unable to live in a finite one

I watch the squirrels. I like to believe they are happy. I am afraid to think of people as I think of squirrels

UCSD 16, 15, 9

++ These sad groups of people trying to be instructed how to be happy— their belief in phrases of almost no content: to be open

or not. It is true I want to be praised, so they could be able to assume me to be 'open'

To leap into the realization of where one is— To feel oneself at the frontier of it— A sense of history

(these people, Mary said, would be happy if they were fighting in the Israeli army))

The leap: one knows things too terrible to say one is careful what he says Close to despair always— But not unhappy.

There may be no actual unhappiness but boredom

THE INTELLECT: THE EXTREME OUTER LIMIT OF THE EGO

Little people huddling together, asking each other how to be happy
Searching for bad poetry: 'love one's neighbor' in a secular context—
The mood of boredom, which has disclosed to them what is ; the mood of dread which is the introduction to the awareness of Being they are sure is merely to put themselves in danger, they will not permit it . .
They are afraid above all of dread And dread is dread, and perhaps remains dread, but it is not precisely unhappiness—

You will not find out from each other how to be happy; and I am not able to tell you either

I would like 'to release us from fiction' (the phrase derived from a sentence of Simone Weil's to the same effect)
'that we may recognize the terrible monotony of evil, and
the supreme marvel of the good' also inaccurately quoted

Save us from fiction, let us save ourselves, let us escape. At any cost.

UCSD 16, 15, 9

++ A poem is a machine made of words to rescue the poet—who else in prison lies

truth is our only home, we live in it. Despite ourselves

all that ceases to move, to change, is alone and disappearing

The poem: it speaks of truth but does not remain outside its material

or else abstract and brutal minds

it is wise for a young poet to avoid the 'modern'
mannerisms, the 'modern' thoughts There are floods of very bad poetry, there may never have been such a flood of useless poetry, and there will be a reaction greater than the reaction against the Romantic

I want to be free from the career of poetry: I want to know what I will be able to say to myself in my life, and I mean *to myself*

in fact my childhood and adolescence were nurse-maided, butlered, chauffeured——I escaped. Easy escape: perhaps I appear as a man heroically fighting a long down-hill battle seeing himself heroic in a long down-hill battle

the performance of Pound's poems in Berkeley:
Tragic; those ridiculous actors, and those vicious lines in his head and in the poems

somewhere half-way between the fact of being singular and the fact of being numerous is the fact of being Jewish

what is needed now is to show that shadows on the wall of the cave are shadows of *something* — — — rather than to spread the admiration of mere non-existence, mere non-world

I choose to BELIEVE IN THE NATURAL CONSCIOUSNESS, I SEE WHAT THE DEER SEE, the desire NOT TO is the desire to be alone in the fear of equality

I am not discontented

I see what the grass would see
if it had eyes

I see what the grass-blade
would see if it had eyes

UCSD 16, 14, 15

++ the feeling is that the poem already exists. The effort is to find the sounds, the words and the syntax which will allow the poem to be heard—above all that the words shall not be too heavy, too pretentious: that there shall be an area of silence; there the poem lives if it lives — — — —

it may seem not a poem, but a place:

not a song but a place.

a gritty poetry, aware of the earth underfoot:
aware of the planet among planets.

the 'epic quality' : fidelity to fact, the objective fact

the subjective is yours, it is your life. It is only that But the cost of disregarding it—in dogma or in science—is to lose your life

To feel oneself at the very beginning of language.

The poem and its music attempts to be one with the experience, which is to say, one with the world

Everything IS REVELATORY. EVERYTHING IS REVELATORY.

But never reveals everything

the 'plain sense' of the poem is the paradise of meaning

There is no other love, there is no other joy

'meaning': a new and strange day.

In meaning the world stops, but is illumined

Everything is here, everything is open and visible

if we speak of god at all, there is nothing which is not god. I don't know what the churches are for.

the poem begins without the words Or with one word or with any word.

in nakedness we are most safe? foolish to answer for we are rarely naked. Simply not to make a fool of oneself. It is pleasant not to make a fool of oneself.

UCSD 16, 14, 15

++ (I seem to have said here that I am sure of my own virtues but not sure of other people's, but I'll let it stand)

the idea that a God who has refrained from telling us so many things, has told us what we should eat, and on which days, and how we should dress, and the proper and improper ways of making love, seems to me literally ridiculous—laughable. Or not laughable, but pitiful. Such a god, says Wilhelm Meister, is not god enough for a flea. But perhaps the basic thing is that I do not dislike the world

I think that I don't know. I mean that I actively think that I don't know

(The poem is a *place*—the nouns are *places*—to enter (derived from Layton (Fuller)

even Jesus thought God had deserted him How could he not have He finds himself nailed to a piece of wood as tho he were a leg of mutton

It is very strange—the stars, the planets the universes visible, and we go about our affairs: 'would you like a soda?'

UCSD 16, 14, 15

++ I am sure that primitive men tribal men were born into terror much greater than ours

the wisdom of primitive man—tho it was wisdom—is the wisdom from which I most wish to free myself

a wisdom whose purpose was to establish limits to freedom, limits to the freedom of the mind

it is moving to read of Don Juan on the desert attempting to deal with the idea of place: telling himself that each man has a *place* For we know that a man does not

I THINK WITH PAIN OF THE HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF MEN AND WOMEN BORN EVEN EARLIER THAN WE

I AM SURE THAT TRIBAL MEN WERE BORN INTO TERROR MUCH GREATER THAN OURS

IT CREATED A KIND OF POETRY A KIND WHICH IS STILL THE POETRY THAT MANY PEOPLE DESIRE AND VALUE A POETRY NOT TO EXTEND THE IMAGINATION BUT TO LIMIT IT, TO FILL THE VOID, TO PEOPLE IT

OUR MACHINERY AND CONSTRUCTIONS REPLACE THE MYTHS AND INSTITUTIONS OF TRIBAL MAN IN FORMING A PSYCHIC PROTECTION AGAINST THE CHAOS OF THE NATURAL WORLD

UCSD 16, 5, 3

++ Not the symbol but the scene, this pavement—Tell the life of the mind, its emotionality, its desperate emotions.

Begin
at the beginning

A shoe
Or a shoe lace

With whatever it is
Precisely

Behind the poetry
Or precisely behind the poetry

I don't know what it is, it is the whole problem

People have accustomed themselves to words like 'to be' they are accustomed to everything

Each word involves the whole of language.
A limit to clarity, or certainly to independence of meaning

The impossibility of living for oneself is simply the knowledge of mortality

to know, to know some things, and against that to test the words and the forms

Of Being Numerous—the roots in the individual, the roots 'in the ontogeny'—of the metaphysical concept of humanity

The 'problem of communication' etc. Some problems! One problem is that one doesn't live forever. The other is that one couldn't bear to.

The content of the consciousness is the work of the consciousness.
Purely arbitrary? not confronted by something?
The absence of consciousness is to exist in the infinite. Probably true—difficult to know precisely what one means. Means *'only* consciousness is finite'?
to be serious, and to know what one means

UCSD 16, 5, 9

++ Essence if one made it to sleep on and does sleep on it, it is a bed

'Love in the genes' etc. The survival value of the human capacity for love is very great In view of the human mind's ability to recognize *where it is* we could not survive without it But it perhaps should not be taken as 'spiritual' in some special sense – – – – – –

the body is that untrained horse, imperfectly trained horse (in Plato) who drags the driver even against his will toward beauty – – –

—toward horse-beauty?

but it is to say: if our own flesh is a conspiracy against us, there is no hope for us

I think the consciousness sinks back into itself when it must (This is familiar experience) (familiar event)

written from the edge of despair, the edge of the void, a paean of praise to the world (Bronk's 'in whole despair')

being together in the world , participate
In divine things ?

the miracle of the existence of the world is not in any unexpected behaviors of things, but in the expected
= ========

The image says how the world is What it's like

ON WRITING A POEM: NOT TO MAKE NOISE: TO KEEP ONE'S ATTENTION OUTWARD TOWARD SILENCE

UCSD 16, 15, 3

++ at certain points, certain places, if one walks forward he steps into water Speak, and it is the sea, we see the sea

the violent poetry

---

the pressures of matter and of eternity increase, the sanctuary cannot endure forever

– – – he steps into water With the word, we know it is the sea, we see the sea.

(we create order and it cannot contain us.)

OOO, they say, such things ! Lizards with two tails, tennis balls that walk! whoo —the mind of man breaks, we will run mad!

The Marvel is the commonplace, the common-place

where everyone has been

The Freudian analysis— simply that it has little to do with— (now) —with what anyone believes that he wants of himself.

'space' in the poem, space on the page: NOT breath—not manner, when space is not silence, the matrix of silence, it is chatter, noise

UCSD 16, 18, 5

++ (*SELF CONSCIOUSNESS IN ITSELF, BY ITSELF, IS THE RECOGNITION OF ACTUALITY*)

The materials: the commonplace, which seems to me so far the most important Life depends on the meaning of the commonplace

I treat—I understand—the entire Western philosophic tradition as also approach to the mysteries 'Philosophy' has no other meaning.

not a concept to be held, but a feeling experienced—They describe an emotion.

just feel opening and the poem will come to you

or the place of the poem the place of
the poem will come to you, and that is the beginning

the inadequate poetry, the chatty, the merely narrative,
is that which has not sufficiently opened.

'an ethic'
one of the core triumphs of a really painstaking
gentility. It has [2 words] with
[one word] exploitation, slavery or murder—

UCSD 16, 15, 9

++ Romantics: they're concerned with their difference, their uniqueness—so thoroughly that the heart of the matter is never touched

in the extreme framework he himself
is not there. All happens will happen
without him

he puts his arms around her—that he may have shelter

'simultaneity' of the poem – – – that all may flow into it, that all may be in it

the world is the organ (machine?) of novelty

what can be found is process

'precisely that thru which consciousness knows itself to be at home with itself is the loss of the spirit' (Hegel)

'simultaneity'—so that everything may flow into it

I can't climb UP; I am trying to climb DOWN— to the bottom of things.

'dressing-up—literally or literarily, is an attempt to free himself from everything that he actually is and from everything that he actually knows.

trained in 'politics', she looks to the basic mass. Trained by at least a little reading of history, I look precisely to the contrary

'difficult': within the area of that 'they understand', there is not room for me to speak

the lines: the vertical structure of the poem

the image is encountered, it carries the rare and most poetic quality of truthfulness. the *simultaneity* of the poem and of experience that all may flow into it

UCSD 16, 16, 7

++ to look down under the boat's rail look toward
The obvious
This is a work of the intellect in that it seeks
The extreme outer limit of the ego

---

the trees moved when he sang, the boat moved down the ways
He sang to the birds and reached the world of the dead

Archangel of the moments
Archangel of the moments

Mind will be he survivor of the world of matter Humanity takes over the stage

—

Wyatt: 'the blatant mystery' (Mary)

'Reality' and 'existence' the past is real? but does not exist

The real; that which possesses an indestructible element, an irreducible element 'if it all went up in smoke. . .'
The real, whose force is never extinguished
'. . .being united within itself and indissoluble' Timaeus

Those perfect
And simple images

Beauty which is most manifest and most desirable' Phaedrus

Beauty, by which we mean the benevolence of the real

The search, which is most painful

There were three crosses

If the road is pre-occupying, swerve off. Wander. Swerve.

We are not returning to nature: we are playing out the drama of free will the drama of 'the Fall'

The sun, his native land, and lethal. Burning.

---

as historical periods draw to a close the arts spin out a world of their own. Which seems, later. . . .

The Indians—all the courage they could find among the dangers of humiliation, suffering, enslavement, and so do we

---

If, as in the Winter Light, the response of joy and love should simply come to an end

UCSD 16, 15, 2

++ Whatever may be found in the poems
—invention of language, of form anything in the poems is nothing more and nothing less than my attempt to say that is, to find what I meant

Poetry—poetika probably we mean by 'poetry' that it is made as a maker makes a thing: each syllable has been carefully considered. and carefully placed.
— meaning acquired by cadence, form, radiance—

we LOOK AT THE FLOWER IN THE CRANNIED WALL AND LOOK FURTHER WITH ALL WE KNOW, WITH ALL THAT HAS HAPPENED

---

there remains the word 'is' for those who can bear it.

And the base of art, the ground of art seems narrowed I become almost frightened: there seems to be no one out there, we seem all to be *in here*

recognition so late, so old—I do not at all regret this, perhaps I wanted it so It seems to me the world might have narrowed for me, I might have been even more ignorant than I am—

---

and the universities they destroy my confidence somewhat they frighten me somewhat : so many of us 'in here' almost nobody 'out there'
—from scratch: it is the only picture I can form

It is *not what* a poem says, but what it is talking about

the danger is of the chess-board: on which everything has already been named

---

Love of the world, the path – – – it is all there is Without which nothing

UCSD 16, 16, 9

THE WIT AND WISDOM OF "LITTLE SUNSHINE"

At long last, a broad selection of the work of a major figure of "The Occult Underground"* is available as *Portable Darkness*, An Aleister Crowley Reader, Edited with a Commentary by Scott Michaelson (New York: Harmony Books, 1989). Since Aleister Crowley (henceforth called "A.C.") was a writer whose work was of incredible pullulation, multicolored, and multifarious, any selection, no matter how broad, can be faulted by devotees, but Mr. Michaelson has in this anthology done a fine job. His focus of selection is to treat A.C.'s Magick as fundamentally *écriture* and as such a premodern example of the postmodern, though no reference is made in the commentaries to Heidegger or Derrida. (A.C. was familiar with reliable expositions of Hegel, if not with the Greater Logic, and his metaphysical fix can be profitably studied in the light of such recent books as Leslie Armour's *Logic and Reality*, Stéphane Lupasco's and George Melhuish's books on Paradoxical Reality, and Howard Kainz's *Paradox, Dialectic, and System.*) But Michaelson is not primarily concerned with situating A.C. in the currents of intellectual history, of successors or predecessors, nor with the use of similar writerly strategies in the *Lao-tse* (which A.C. "translated"), Heraclitus, Nietzsche, or various Buddhist writings. He is content to underline the recursions, aporias, and traps that A.C. constantly and cunningly contrives.

Michaelson divides his anthology into 5 parts, under these headings: 1. Qabalah and Magick; 2. Yoga and Magick; 3. Sex and Magick; 4. Liber AL, The Book of the Law; and, 5. The Book of Lies. It is *The Book of Lies, Which Is Also Falsely Called BREAKS The Wanderings or Falsifications of the One Thought of Frater Perdurabo Which Thought is Itself Untrue*, a small book of 91 sections which can be read as a box of prose-poems, published originally in 1913, that is Michaelson's personal favorite among A.C.'s works, and a generous selection from it is included in Part 5. (In 1961 I published 3 sections from it in a poetry magazine I edited, SET, #1.)

* The Occult Underground now hides itself on the Surface in full view, according to some.

Michaelson deliberately chooses not to reprint any selections from A.C.'s autobiographical works, journals, fictions, and poems (with the exception of the notorious "Hymn to Pan"), as well as most specifically magical and ritual texts. For those in pursuit of such matters he appends a short but helpful bibliography. It is A.C. as Writer and Theorist of Writing who interests him, and his Reading therefore is "a secular reading. . .a game of hide and seek, a surprising reading taking place in the Dark. It is a reading that intentionally tries not to shed New Light (with its attendant rationalism) on him. Throughout, I merely take Aleister Crowley at his Word, and, like him, do not concern myself with remaining doctrinaire." *Portable Darkness* thus involves "both the creative act and its impossibility—the Silence of composition. . ." and like Forgery the "displacing words of Dark and Light to a new Writing site."

Hence Michaelson re-visions the intrinsic elusiveness of A.C.'s thought not from a Magickal perspective, but as part of the fun and games of Philosophical Investigation, and the "Naught-y Knot" of the Fool is never resolved. He does not shirk the playful difficulties of the writing, reprinting "heavy" texts as well as comic tours de force such as the "Interlude" on the Occult Meanings of Nursery Rhymes. And in *The Book of Lies* A.C.'s impish humor comes to the fore to floor us.

So it's a serious book to have fun with. The popularity of A.C. in certain non-academic circles (the anthology boasts forewords by Robert Anton Wilson and Genesis P-Orridge) should suggest the interest of looking into his work even by those unsympathetic to the ostentation of his ostensible ideas.

Portable Darkness is also portable sunlight. In a British courtroom in 1934 A.C. said to the cross-examining attorney "You can call me 'Little Sunshine.'"

—Gerrit Lansing

INDEPENDENT REALITIES: NOTES ON ROBIN BLASER'S *PELL MELL*

At a modest 114 pages, *Pell Mell* (Coachhouse Press, 1988) is a big book, both in the way in which it gathers and clarifies Robin Blaser's poetic concerns and practices, and in the range of the propositions it offers about language, aesthetics, cosmology, and the art of poetry. In "The Fire" essay of 1970, Blaser had said that "the real business of poetry is cosmology"; in *Pell Mell* he argues this proposal amidst the dissonant hum of contemporary voices:

listen, kid,
there isn't anything but art
and the effort to turn it into
the same discourse as
everything else is
scientific
angelism. . . (11)

"It is an apocalypse of the objective or of a generalized humanity which can be seen as an objectivity," Blaser says, "a disguised superstition" ("V," 63). In an effort to demystify, deconstructionists tirelessly draw attention to the fact that language seems to be structured to reveal truth and cannot: as Blaser hears it, such attachment to truth and to the language object as such ("a construct of philosophers and linguists" says Wlad Godzich) is a form of positivism. Against which, *Pell Mell* presents the mind as frying pan—"what's in it is neither true nor false" (93).

In "The Ruler," Blaser offers a fable about the acquisition of language which reads like a poet's primer. The poem opens with "alligator, hippopotamus, fox, rhinoceros/ and frog" in "rowing shells," or word-boats which become directions that never arrive. From a pre-articulate, bodily entanglement with things which Blaser writes as metaphor ("your eyes are wooden"), the word-boats move their occupants into the distinctions of simile ("your eyes are like wood") and metonymy (lists of wooden things—"match girl," "tree," "boards," wooden? "ruler"). Language creates difference—so—but as the "boats" move outward, separating one thing from another, they also draw the body into contiguity with the world that is forming. The language ruler is "a child's 25 centimetre/measure of the old foot"—a measure of steps taken toward something that only becomes a thing in the process of the meeting. "[W]hat did I think language/did, as I grew up," Blaser asks in "Anecdote," "well,/it pulled me into//and out-of, upwards-of/and downwards-of, the/side-by-side, serpentine friendship" (*PM* 40).

In "The Practice of Outside," Blaser credits Vico with "an argument for the relation of poetry to 'the qualitative and dynamic function of the primordial moment,' to which we inevitably return" (301). Vico rejects the notion that the gods were projections of a fully defined human nature; rather they functioned as relations—connectors, syntactical modes—through which humans defined themselves as they created a world to live in. In one of his stories, giants respond to "bodies as vast as sky, sea, and earth" by spinning a cosmology. Blaser's "Giant," a poem that recalls Vico's primordial scene (note the dislocation of Freud), returns to "the sacred vacant lot" to take up the issue of a cultural syntax again. That contempo-

rary culture does not—and cannot—share a "permanent," univocal syntax is precisely the argument of *Pell Mell.*

The history of "the twentieth-/ century project" Blaser says, is that of the search "for a new relation among/things" (*PM* 99). What we inherit from the old cosmologies is cultural rubble, embedded in a language which is "older and other than ourselves" ("SM," 61):

> [fragment structures—serial poems—
> all having to do with materiality of
> form—having to do with death] (*PM* 14)

These fragments, Blaser suggests, were once active relations; the contemporary task is to recover not the old structures but the ability to create the relational web-work that composes people, places and things. In order to wrench this world-making process (and it is a process) away from the "angelisms" that would give the lie to such poetic activity or condemn it as a form of totalization, Blaser relocates a veritable forest of sacred ruins within a history of consciousness, and then in place of the closed syntax usually associated with cosmology, he proposes an open-ended "art of combinations":

> 'we conclude with cosmography, the
> connection of subjects to each other'
> 'consumed in the overwhelming
> existence' (*PM* 58)

This poem, which takes its title from Leibnitz's *De Arte Combinatoria*, recalls that philosopher's life-long search for a set of primitives and the rules by which they might be combined: "cosmography" is a quest for syntax—one that Leibnitz could not complete. The contemporary significance of the Leibnitzian combinatory, however, is that the elements of it can be endlessly recombined to produce new forms. Given that a universal grammar has never been found (as Blake says it, "there is no natural religion"), the art of combinations is, for a poet like Blaser, the art of post-syntactic composition.

Within the history of the "twentieth-century project," the ideogram provides an early model, but unlike Pound, Blaser does not attempt to "make it cohere." There are no formal paradigms that serve to gather and illuminate the particulars of the poem—no universal or everlasting states of mind. (Compare the movement from metonymy to metaphor, part to whole in Canto 2, with Blaser's reversal of that process in "The Ruler"). Against the ahistorical impulse in Pound's synchronism, Blaser shares Olson's "special view of history," in which the "man-line" (diachronic) and

the "continuum" (cultural inheritance) cut against each other. And yet in *Syntax* Blaser records this comment:

> Olson said, "I'd trust you
> anywhere with image, but
> you've got no syntax" (1958) (33)

Olson's "projective" syntax follows the perceptual movements of the experiencing subject: in contrast, Blaser has "no syntax." His poems function as a kind of public forum for a host of voices, most of which are quoted without commentary. These fragments Blaser then arranges in a polylogue which mediates and contextualizes his own voice—that *"little devil of an I"* which *"is neither first, nor a person, nor singular" (PM* 113), but itself a combinatory. In this passage taken from James Hillman, Blaser says

> *. . .experience can only*
> *be unified by the style in which it is enacted, by the images*
> *which formed it, by its repetitive thematics, and by the*
> *relations amid which it unfolds. (PM* 113)

Experience is thus language internalized, language continually recombining. The *art* of combination lies in the poet's ability to reshuffle the various givens of a cultural (linguistic) inheritance in such a manner as to open the past to possibility. The task of aesthetics is to loosen the syntactic ties that threaten to bind the future to the past, in order to return the contents of a cultural history, pell mell, back to the "sacred vacant lot"—"where elements of the *overwhelming/permanence escape into the flux" (PM,* 47), and begin to recompose.

It is the inheritance—that blend of literary history, myth, radio music, philosophy, and neighborly encounters—which most strikingly distinguishes *Pell Mell* from much contemporary poetry. I'm thinking of poetry that emphasizes social concerns or linguistic surfaces, but more particularly of the cultural amnesia which accompanies the post-modern rejection of "high art," cosmological speculation and talk about the unknown. Blaser risks remembering (risks inviting ideology critique), to make the point that cosmology is a renewable practice, a *poiesis*, and to remind the reader that *poiesis* involves the making of relationships not only with other humans but with "bodies as vast as sky, sea, and earth." Hence, wandering across these pages, Dante, Blake, Mallarmé, Coleridge, Montaigne, Leibnitz, Bach, Nietzsche, Freud, Marx, Derrida, Serres, Dionysus, Christ, Horus, Amon, Re, Osiris, Isis, Aphrodite, "kindly Apollo," and a little girl trick-or-treating on this all hallows' eve, "sweet, burned face/of imagination" *(PM,* 75).

Citations

PM = *Pell Mell* (Coach House, 1988); "PO" = "Practice of Outside," in *The Collected Books of Jack Spicer* (Black Sparrow, 1980); "SM" = "The Stadium of the Mirror," in *Image-Nations 1-12 & The Stadium of the Mirror* (Ferry Press, 1974); *Syntax* (Talonbooks, 1983); "V" = "The Violets," *Line* 2 (Fall 1983).

—Miriam Nichols

A FORCE OF LANGUAGE: A REVIEW OF *IT THEN* BY DANIELLE COLLOBERT, TRANSLATED BY NORMA COLE (OAKLAND: O BOOKS, 1989)

At first glance, Collobert's page reminds one of Dickinson; the overwhelming visual impression, even before one has read a single word of the text, is of the conjunctive use of the dash, collobert's exclusive mark of punctuation. The page already graphically suggests a driving intensity, a force of language. The mark of the dash, as one begins to read Collobert, indicates a double movement, a joining and its opposition, a resistance, a resistance at the juncture which forces the break, one's sense of brokenness throughout this work.

If Dickinson's use of the dash represents a breathless hesitation, a pause which creates or re-creates the effect of the mind considering its thought, testing the possible alternative utterances to follow, then Collobert's dash is a materialization of the gap within speech and the rush to close even as one discloses it; one cannot linger there in contemplation: the dash is the mark of the goad. One leaps at its prodding to the ground of the inevitable word or phrase; the page bears the record of these bursts of language.

One imagines Dickinson's halting voice as an exquisitely contrived artifact; the voice one constructs out of Collobert's page seems unmediated by art. The intent "to embody," as if one could write directly from the body, is manifest at the opening. At the very beginning, the body itself is Collobert's subject and object: "—to embody—with flesh in pain—to embody like the thumbnail—It then."

> In his first seminars, Lacan introduced metonymy as a progression, a displacement: language moves, slides. The signifiers are displaced to infinity. They take on body, form a carnal, elastic material. As limited as they are, these surfaces do not contain their limit, which seems to be outside of them.[1]

Collobert imagines an "it," some primal force perhaps, the *id* perhaps, an "it" one imagines to be essentially unlimited, speechless, not one, but another. Yet it is one (we are given to understand) though it is also the other, "a body there," one of whose limits is violence ("the one banging its face against the wall"), one of whose limits is speech.

Collobert inscribes the absolute disparity between language and the body, and she does so by displacement, by imagining the "wordless body" to be a site, a "lifeless body some place" in utter contrast to the "choice/ to choose the flow of the body—speech—choice of desire's/ hesitation—of the desirable—to want—circuit of desire" (45). This metonymous flow displaces the silent body, "inventing—intangible discourse" (51): a discourse "seeking the way out of the body" into the infinity of signifiers? Perhaps. But the body is limited by acts of violence, by threats of violence, and the discourse too is broken, disrupted, threatened. Language threatens, seduces; she imagines "complete submission/ to the bites of the word" (49).

> In a specific place someone wounded its infinity.[1]

It Then is divided into three parts. Part I opens on what seem to be scenes of the grief of childhood, memories of masochistic violence, but something else as well, the underlying sense of an archaic unspeakable wound. That wound may have been inflicted in "a specific place," but it is nevertheless everywhere; the wound multiplies, riddling the surface (the "ground" or "earth") which immediately "crumbles—it melts—words penetrating the ground—it dissolves—. . ." (47).

In Part II Collobert imagines "another body" which is not so much addressed as it is assaulted with words: "massacred by the words—violence always insatiable" (55) which is also the imagined annihilation of "it" (the subject—Collobert never uses the first person pronoun). She opens herself to the repetitious "circuit of desire," to the pain, but also to "its song," in search of a limit. The limit of language, of the body? It's as if the one were completely displaced by the other: "it repeats the circuit to infinity—. . .seeking the exhaustion—the stop to the chains of words. . ." (88).

One gradually begins to understand the oppressiveness of infinity in this work, for it overwhelms each present moment with the "long shudder of overpopulated memory" or "old traces of having been" or

> the voices irreplaceable losses—distant jamming—absence of reference—dissolved—absence of faces—loss of bodies—disappeared gazes and mouths—buried in motionless images—. . . (59)

The present is occupied by a "hollow" body whose contents seem to fill all of space with such "fixity of dead moments—underlying—inscribed there—/ forever—in the loss" (64).

Collobert imagines she stands at the archaic site (who has not imagined it?) of the mythical "first words of prehistory— memory of the far-off—" and it is the site of an apocalypse: volcanic eruption, the threat of an inundating tidal wave. She imagines speech as a force of nature, a river perhaps, "the voice currents. . .weighed down by the out-/ flowing/ alluvial deposits . . ." (62).

"It" is the source of this violence, this flow, but "it" is also the site of an absolute ignorance, of the self's lack of knowledge of "it." Collobert imagines this gap at the close of Part II:

> . . .—invis-
> ible rustling of the whole body
> invisible—not to be seen
> never seen from there where it sees
> not seen—. . . (93)

In the final part of *It Then*, Collobert begins to draw the fragments of speech together into a kind of inventory towards the end. It is an inventory which bears a remarkable similarity to the list of items adduced by Lacan, not as examples of what the "unconscious" is (that which he called "the censored chapter"), but rather of what might be thought of as artifacts of speech and writing which replace the unconscious.[2]

Lacan would speak of the body as a "monument" which is "inscribed" with a language difficult to "decipher." Collobert too would draw out this figure:

> silent monoliths—engraved on the surface—untranslat-
> able signs—searches all around—the space—searches
> for its jumbled body—invents possible translations—
> conjugates obstructed the verb—being without subject
>
> all the forms of the negative—or gaping—the abstract—
> images absent from time—accessible by reconstruction—
> to reproduce the duration by increments—around silence
> —in the meantime lost the traces of life (100)

In this passage, as elsewhere, Collobert insists on "being without subject," as if being were radically different from, absolutely divided from its subject. And like an archeologist she preserves the fragments of this ruined subject against time, "to reproduce the duration. . . ." This itself, one

realizes, is the true artifact. It is time, empty and silent, that stretches in the gaps, the negative she materializes.

Collobert's archeological catalogue includes (in Lacan's words) "archival documents": "the buried text," "the memory of the remains—writing inside out" (101).

The passages which follow are appalling in the intensity of their imagination of the literal body transmuted into writing. If the word ("It"?) "becomes flesh," then the flesh must become words in repeated acts of self-inflicted torture in which the body is imagined to be "ripped," "incised," "opened up," "drained," in which one "empties its body of its words."

So that one may at last decipher a "subject" as if it were, as Lacan says, "like an object"?[3]

> the subject
> which
> a word
> upon a word—which—gaze—white—gaze—inscribes
> itself—the trace subject—somewhere—for some time—
> the visible to itself if not whose—illegible trace—improb-
> able—deciphered
>
> forever its body subject
> the undefined subject
> the writing of the definition (111)

Finally: ". . .—finally accepts the future form—/ already inscribed inside the words—sees itself written—/ in the end—last word" (121).

Again, one may be reminded of Dickinson, of the poems in which she imagines a posthumous existence within the grave, or immortality beyond the grave, as Collobert writes:

> last of the written—walled up—tomb—if tried the
> inscription on the door—whereas behind the body of dust
> —the imaginary written absolute—a noun name
> a noun name subject
> absent the body
> no identity of any kind anywhere in the dust (121)

There's nothing in Dickinson, of course, that so fiercely objectifies the body, that imagines so completely the separation of subject and object, and the constitution of the subject within language. There is a sense in which Collobert submits to the triumph of the sign, perhaps, or to the recognition of the symbolic order and its power to confer subjectivity.

In any case, the tomb is empty; Collobert finally imagines the "mute body/ traded for articulation" with no remainder. The formal ending of this work breaks the circuit of loss and desire:

> It then—migrated
> transcribed

I would like to acknowledge the presentation of this book by Leslie Scalapino and Tom White. It is, in my opinion, perfectly well-designed and printed as if one actually had a reader in mind.

—Beverly Dahlen

Notes

1 Michèle Montrelay, "The Story of Louise," *Returning to Freud: Clinical Psychoanalysis in the School of Lacan*, Stuart Schneiderman, ed. and trans. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1980) p. 77.
2 Jacques Lacan, "The function and field of speech and language in psychoanalysis," *Ecrits*, Alan Sheridan, trans. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977) p. 50.
3 *Ecrits*, p. 86.

MICHEL LEIRIS. *BRISÉES: BROKEN BRANCHES.* TRANS. LYDIA DAVIS. SAN FRANCISCO: NORTH POINT PRESS, 1989.
MICHEL LEIRIS. *NIGHTS AS DAY, DAYS AS NIGHT.* TRANS. RICHARD SIEBURTH. HYGIENE, COLORADO: ERIDANOS PRESS, 1987.

"A journey," quotes Michel Leiris from Claude Lévi-Strauss's *Tristes Tropiques*, "is inscribed simultaneously in space, time, and the social hierarchy." In turn, I imagine this phrase inscribed not only as an epigraph for the essay collection *Brisées: Broken Branches*, in which Leiris's review of Lévi-Strauss appears, but at the portals of Leiris's work as a whole. Whether we read his *L'Afrique fantôme*, a strange melange of ethnographic documentation, dream journal, diary, and meta-fiction; his five-part autobiography, *Le règle du jeu*, the first part of which *(Manhood)* is subtitled "A Journey from Childhood Into the Fierce Order of Virility"; his dream book, *Nights as Day, Days as Night*, which over a forty-year span charts a Northwest Passage between waking- and dream-life; or his essay collection *Brisées*, which gives an extended sense of what James Clifford has called "ethnographic surrealism," the discovery in both everyday life and art, in both familiar spaces and distant countries, of hidden repositories of non-rational truth—in each of these works, the journey is of a privileged

figure. Yet for Leiris, journeying is neither an escape into exoticism ("His attempted escape has been a complete failure, and anyway he no longer believes in the value of escape") nor the precondition of homecoming, to a home transfigured simply by the fact of having left it. On the contrary, Leiris is haunted in all his journeying, his physical and mental travelling, by the demon of the Same: a loss of nothing at all, not even of his obsessions and ghosts, but the illusion that the quest will liberate him of himself. Leiris—or was it Rimbaud?—discovers the Same, before and after Africa: "I am always here."

As his dream journals and essays show, however, this literal disillusionment is the precondition of a writing that starts out from its inescapable situatedness, from the necessity of its phantoms, whether they be ethnographic, artistic, or sexual—in short: from the haunting reversibility and uncanny sameness of the world as such ("nights as day, days as night") grasped as a simulacrum of itself. Doubling and identity: the same recurs, arriving always after itself, divesting itself of illusory worth, coming in always "second." Leiris prefaces *Nights as Day, Days as Night* with a quotation from Gérard de Nerval—"Dream is a second life." The dream, in its very secondness, is the paradigm of the same. And indeed, in the course of writing up his dream log, decades after they were first dreamed, Leiris comes to a crucial insight about himself: that his life has been lived under the sign of "2," that a dualism lurks at the heart of his identity. Duality, he notes of a dream from 1933, shortly after his first trip to Africa, "seems to be the connecting thread in this dream: the co-directors of the magazine *Minotaure;* the double function of the hall I'm in, at once church nave and hotel lobby; the twinning of Notre-Dame and the Sainte-Chapelle; the doubling of the bus terminus, representing a threat to the reconstitution of my wife and myself as a couple. Was it not a fact that the two or so years I had spent travelling had practically estranged us? Was it not true that from that point on my professional life would find itself between two stools, seeing as how my work as an ethnographer would now be superadded to my activities as a writer?"

Another dualism: his writing, a throwing away of his self (it will always return) in an act of both imaginative empathy—as the self-effacing essays in *Brisées* testify—and of abjection, of *suicide.* Writing itself, the activity of putting the same in words, was the means by which Leiris economized between these two poles; through writing, Leiris kept his powerful impulse to self-extinction—a death never present for him, always fleeing into the interstices of a series of identities, the spaces between his "selves"—in play. But in writing, he doomed himself to recur again to the necessity of self-sacrifice, a judgement he sealed with his own signature. From this fatal game, played in the darkness of dream and of waking life alike, and which paradoxically kept him alive, Leiris patiently documented *for others* "the

profound meaning of suicide: to become at the same time *oneself and the other*, male and female, subject and object, killed and killer—the only possibility of communion with oneself."

—Tyrus Miller

JEAN BAUDRILLARD. *AMERICA*. TRANS. CHRIS TURNER. NEW YORK: VERSO, 1988. 129 + X PP. $13.95 (PAPER).

In *America*, Jean Baudrillard replicates de Tocqueville's exploration of the New World as a socio-cultural entity. According to Baudrillard, America is an entropic process dedicated not to the social construction of equality but to a more radical equalization: the progressive decomposition of all cultural forms towards a vanishing point of absolute moral and esthetic insignificance.

Baudrillard's *nouvelle* America is engaging and often acutely rendered. For example, Baudrillard describes the New York Marathon as a set of autistically insular, and vacuous, demonstrations of the self as one-who-finishes, and suggests building demolition as the quintessential art form of urban America. But beneath the gallic wit, the anxiety of the Old World at what it understands as the irretrievable loss of significance, of culture—in short, of itself—is clearly visible. Baudrillard's sense of America as a kind of ethic/esthetic black hole results in a limited vision of his subject that is too often mesmerizing but superficial, not unlike the television "play of images" (96) that, in his view, typifies the low-calorie cultural diet of America.

"I ask of the Americans only that they be Americans. I do not ask them to be intelligent, sensible, original," Baudrillard announces (27). His portrait of an America comprised of an intellectual lumpen proletariat whose "radical modernity" is "founded on the absence of difference" (87) predictably fails to account for the multi-cultural diversity of contemporary American literature (Leslie Marmon Silko, Ishmael Reed, Maxine Hong Kingston, Sandra Cisneros, Toni Morrison, Jimmy Santiago Baca), for artists such as Robert Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein and Jasper Johns, whose culturally reflexive works both critique and respond to the iconic American images that Baudrillard finds merely banal, or for the powerful interdisciplinary projects of American theorists from Noam Chomsky to Nancy Chodorow, Ruth Hubbard to Thomas Kuhn, Catherine Mackinnon to Stanley Cavell, Richard Rorty to Carol Gilligan.

Of much graver consequence than this high-cultural paternalism, however, is Baudrillard's inability to appreciate the profound ways in which America's "'anthropological' culture," as he calls it, is genuinely creative and esthetically significant on its own terms. Despite his acknowledgment of "the imperialism of the idea of culture" itself (83), he is unable to resist replacing what he sees in the context of his European academic assumptions about what constitutes art.

According to Baudrillard, real art—"Rembrandts, Impressionists, and Greek statues" (101)—exists in America only trapped in the Getty Museum's "fake Pompeian decor" (33), an eventuation he finds "astonishing in its nonsensicality" (101). But Baudrillard's confusion of the absence of pedigree with "the absence. . .of. . .the imaginary" (84) prevents him from recognizing the illegitimate value of indigenous American cultural phenomena such as rap (Public Enemy, KRS-One), New York subway graffiti, California murals, underground comics *(Zap, Bent),* tattooing (Lyle Tuttle, Phil Sparrow), low rides, Harley Davidsons, the myriad fashions of clothing and hairstyles, and—the single most crucial creative mode—the subcultural languages, or *paroles,* "on parole" from their incarceration within the confines of standard English. Baudrillard's failure to hear these daimonic voices, in all their intricate beauty, is a crucial failure to hear the def records of the street.

—Jody Norton

MARJORIE PERLOFF

The Complete Poems of Anna Akhamatova, trans. Judith Hemschemeyer; ed. and introduced by Roberta Reeder. 2 Vols. (Somerville, Mass.: Zephyr Press, 1990). 1511 pp. $85.00.

The new *Akhamatova,* a bilingual edition, with extraordinary notes, biographies, photographs, illustrations, and facsimile pages, would be a bargain at twice the price. The poems themselves, of which more in a moment, are framed, in Volume I, by a Translator's Preface, in which Judith Hemschemeyer, herself a poet, provides valuable comments on Akhamatova's prosody and stylistic habits, and by the editor Roberta Reeder's 160-page critical biography of the poet, which could easily have been published as a separate book. Then in Volume II, there are further biographical memoirs, this time by Isaiah Berlin and by Akhamatova's protegé, the critic Anatoly Naiman. At the back of Volume II, following a group of 200 uncollected lyrics (some of Akhamatova's most brilliant poem,

reproduced from V. M. Zhirmunsky's 1976 Leningrad edition), there are detailed scholarly notes on the poem and a full bibliography. The production job (the arrangement is chronological, the Russian on facing pages, with the fascinating photographs, lithographs, and drawings giving a very full picture of Akhamatova and her circle from childhood to old age, interspersed throughout) seems to me quite simply stunning.

For some reason, Akhamatova's poetry had never really penetrated my consciousness as had Khlebnikov's or Mayakovsky's or Pasternak's. I knew English versions of some of her famous poems like "I Visited the poet. . ." (to Alexander Blok) and "The Tale of the Black Ring," but found her seemingly straightforward lyrics on love and sorrow and death too direct and "simple" to have the appeal that, say, Khlebnikov's complicated linguistic experiments had for me. But reading Akhamatova in these new translations (on the whole, *excellent* in capturing the poems' visual lay-out, tone, and sound quality—at least so it seems to a novice in the Russian language like me), in the light of Reeder's fascinating account of the poet's life has made me a total convert. This is not the place for a full-scale review of the Zephyr Press edition, but here are a few thoughts I want to share with *Sulfur* readers.

(1) Akhamatova's poetry uses very little figuration; it is primarily heightened natural speech presented in straightforward syntax in the rhythms of folk song and *dolnik* (a poem with a fixed number of stresses but not a fixed number of syllables, usually with a complicated rhyme scheme and echolalia). But, like Goethe's lyric, which it very much resembles, Akhamatova's is *occasional* poetry whose strength lies in capturing, by means of delicate verbal adjustments, the exact emotion of a particular moment. Here is a poem of 1915, dedicated to the critic and connoisseur N.V. Nedobrovo, a man with whom Akhamatova shared a great deal but with whom she was not in love:

> There is a sacred boundary between those who are close,
> And it cannot be crossed by passion or love—
> Though lips fuse in dreadful silence
> And the heart shatters to pieces with love.
>
> Friendship is helpless here, and years
> Of exalted and ardent happiness,
> When the soul is free and a stranger
> To the slow languor of voluptuousness.

Those who strive to reach it are mad, and those
Who reach it—stricken by grief. . .
Now you understand why my heart
Does not beat faster under your hand. (I, 391)

If the English version cannot quite capture the rhythmic quality of the original, with its intricately sounded four-stress lines and prominent rhymes *(strasti / chasti; toskoio / rukoio),* it does convey the poet's startling admission that for her, love is not based on psychological or emotional communion but on "the slow languor of voluptuousness," that without that "slow languor," "my heart / Does not beat faster under your hand." This last phrase seems almost hackneyed until we stop to consider what it really means. For the poet is not making the standard Romantic speech about her inability to return her lover's passion; she is not gently but firmly refusing his suit. On the contrary, it is while she is letting him caress her breasts and having sex with him, that she tells this close friend and ardent lover that he just doesn't turn her on.

There is a cruel, almost a brutal element in such confession, and indeed one begins to see Akhamatova as anything but the "domestic" poet (Trotsky witheringly dismissed her as a "doctor of female ailments"), she is often taken to be. Her love poems (and her best poems *are* love poems) run the gamut from self-abasement to intense erotic satisfaction, from contempt for a husband to pity for a former lover and shyness in the face of a new encounter, from *schadenfreude* at the defeat of a rival to total despair at the rejection by a new love object. Indeed, the force and violence of the poet's response to the passions leads me to a second observation.

(2) Akhamatova's lyric is animated by an assumption that goes counter to all current feminist talk of victimization at the hands of the patriarchy, of the second-class status of women, and so on. That assumption is that a woman can be as strong and powerful as any man. Akhamatova let nothing interfere with her work, a work she refused to distinguish from life, and especially from sexual love—neither marriage (a bond under which she chafed and repeatedly dissolved) nor motherhood (she left her only child Lev in the country to be brought up by relatives), nor the extreme poverty and deprivation that came after the Revolution, nor the censorship of her work under Stalin. When World War II broke out, she gave radio speeches, mobilizing the women of Leningrad. The poet Olga Beggolts recalls, "With a face severe and angry, a gas mask thrown over her shoulder, she took on the fire watch like a regular soldier. She sewed bags for sand which were put on the trenches." If she was not a "good" mother in her youth, she spent endless hours of her maturity trying to free her son, a prominent scholar, from arrest and exile, going so far as to write verses to Stalin so as to plead

Lev's cause. Her efforts on behalf of her imprisoned friend Osip Mandelstam are legendary. In the fifties, during the final decade of her life, when she was ousted from the Union of Soviet Writers, she earned her living translating the works of Serbian, Armenian, and Ukrainian authors.

At a time when many of our own poets and artists are so obsessed by the NEA debacle that they seem to have forgotten why they became poets in the first place, Anna Akhamatova provides the most luminous example imaginable of *what can be done.* And further: at a time when the "woman artist" is too often represented as a Camille Claudel (the title of a recent film), who must choose between "art" and "love," it is refreshing to witness Akhamatova's life-long conviction that she had to have both and that one fed the other. Indeed, if one reads straight through from *Evening* (1912), published when Akhamatova was only twenty-three, to the lyrics of the sixties collected in *Seventh Book*, the image that emerges is of a powerful woman to whom every turn presents a formidable roadblock but who not only survives but triumphs. A highly improbable tale for the twentieth century and hence doubly rewarding.

Manuel Brito's Zasterle Press (available from Apdo 167, La Laguna, Tenerife, Canary Islands, Spain) has recently brought out, as part of a new series, two handsomely produced chapbooks, Jerome Rothenberg's *The Lorca Variations* (1–8) (36 pp.) and Ron Silliman's *Manifest* (28 pp.).

In a "Postface," Rothenberg explains that these poems "draw on vocabulary (especially nouns & adjectives) from my translations of the Suites [to be published by Farrar Straus as part of a single-volume collected translations from Lorca] but rearrange them in a variety of ways. . . . The methods used resemble chance operations but with a margin of flexibility, with total freedom in the case of verbs and adverbs, with occasional addresses to Lorca himself imbedded in them."

The ironized, or, more accurately, urbanized Lorca that emerges from these *Variations* is one of Rothenberg's most inspired sequences. "Shinto Eyes," for example, which opens with the image of "Shinto eyes. / Shinto ivy," takes us through "Real forests" where "teardrops are roads, / fields are death," to a God, not only "alive in a rice field. / Herons over the road," but finally to a moment when

> God in a necktie
> stares out
>
> through two secret eyes.

Manifest is a section of Silliman's ongoing long poem *The Alphabet.* This one contains one hundred short prose paragraphs ranging from a three-

word sentence ("Paragraphs to go") to the ten line (but also one sentence) passage on p. 25 beginning with "The wonders of public transit stop-start. . . ." As in previous *Alphabet* parts, Silliman splices sentences that are seemingly quite unrelated and that nevertheless add up to present an exuberant, searing, and densely allusive commentary on everyday life, Silliman style. The challenge of the opening sentence—"So you're one too"—generates the "Festival of Unfinished Projects" that follows.

Finally, a note about a recent exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum: *Envisioning America: Prints, Drawings, and Photographs by George Grosz and His Contemporaries 1915–1933*, by Beeke Sell Tower, with an essay by John Czaplicka, organized by the Busch-Reisinger Museum, Harvard University, 1990. The catalogue produced by Beeke Sell Tower and her associates (123 pp.) documents the rise and fall of America as Germany's desirable Other. Especially intriguing to us in the '90s is the vision (c. 1910–25) of America as land of the *Asphaltcowboys* and *Stadtindianer*, which is to say that New York Metropolis and Wild West, the hyper-technological and the hyper-primitive, are joined in a vision of sheer otherworldy magic. George Grosz's *The Golddigger* (1916), for example, depicts a brawny he-man, spade in hand, prospecting in an open field, behind which are the outlines of skyscrapers; or again, in Rudolf Schlichter's *Cinema* (1914), Wild West cowgirl is represented as a kind of urban prostitute. The German fascination with the American machine, with Fordism and "rationality," and with an entrepreneurial enterprise the "backward" Germans could only envy, gives way, in the later twenties, to the much darker vision of Heartfield's *Dada-merika* and *Dollarica*, with its heartless commercialism and Capitalist greed. Grosz's own primitivist Indian fantasies give way to such pessimistic sketches as "Soon Europe will be a Suburb of New York" (c. 1924), where the head and torso of a frowning American businessman is silhouetted against a stylized image of the American flag. Somehow, it all looks very contemporary.

FOUR RECENT FRENCH PUBLICATIONS

The Situationist Guy Debord was one of the leading participants in the Parisian "events of May '68," and his book of that epoch, *La société du spectacle*, had a major influence in shaping cultural critique. The last few years (marked by the 20th anniversary of the events) saw a revival of

interest—both historical and nostalgic—in that era, due in great part to the Situationist show at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, and too the publication of Debord's *Commentaires sur la société du spectacle*, a particularly paranoid, but tragically all-too-just, reappraisal of both his earlier efforts and of the course of subsequent history. But what went for the most part unnoticed was the publication last year of Debord's "autobiography," *Panégyrique* (Paris: Editions Gérard Lebovici, 1989). This small volume may well, in fact, take its place among the great French memoirs—but as their shadow figure, their radical inversion. Classic in style, elegant in form, and brilliant in dissimulation, *Panégyrique* is the calmest of all possible recollections of a man who led the most turbulent of all possible lives. While Louis XIV wrote his *Mémoires* as the regal, imperative, and hyperbolically narcissistic statement of absolute power, Debord—in a linguistic classicism equal too the Sun King—describes a life devoted to overturning all systems of control and to eschewing all power. The emblematic chapter on his passion for drink is hilarious and profound, a statement of both his own condition and of the course of history itself: for it leads us to reflect upon a phrase by Li Po which he cites: "Deceitful time hides its traces from us, but it passes, rapidly." Shall we take this as the sign of the historian and autobiographer, who teaches us too remember; or of the alcoholic and panegyrist, who would have us forget? In either case, *Panégyrique* may be read as a critique of those equally dissimulating memoirs of our own presidents and prime ministers—much as we read Saint-Simon contra Louis XIV—or else it can be read simply as an exercise in style, and as yet one more brilliant spectacle to be commented upon.

L'oeuvre des mers (Paris: Editions François Bourin, 1988) by Eugène Nicole, are memoirs of a different sort—a novel which transforms the author's childhood reminiscences of Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon (a French overseas *département* located off the coast of Nova Scotia) into a Proustian narrative where personal memory is transfigured into art. (Eugène Nicole was one of those responsible for the recent republication of Proust in the Pléiade edition.) These islands—lost in the Atlantic, isolated, fog enshrouded, storm battered, and populated by a mere few thousand people—become a microcosm, the stuff that myths and dreams are made of. Yet this geographic monad is all-too-willing to communicate with the outside, whence the double dynamic of the tale, where history and phantasy, autobiography and fiction, are indistinguishable. Personal events cross with the great "upheavals" caused by the sudden incursions of the outside world: the arrival of a transcontinental steamer from Australia; Lindberg's famous flight; and perhaps most of all the seemingly banal but certainly most crucial arrival and departure of the mails. Rarely has the cover of a book been as accurately symbolic of its contents: its border consists of

reproductions of a French postage stamp depicting this archipelago, couched between two gigantic, protective fishermen. For it is indeed through the mails that these island folk communicated with the rest of the world; and it is through this book that Eugène Nicole communicates these islands—via his sublime prose—to us. We await the translation of this book—a runner-up for the Prix Medicis—into English.

A most curious and disquieting book was just republished in French translation from the Spanish: Max Aub's *Crimes exemplaires* (1956; fr. trans. by Danièle Guibbert; Paris: Cent Pages, 1990). As it was written by a fellow-traveler of the Surrealists, it is difficult to ascertain whether this book is fact or fiction; whatever the case, it is a masterpiece of black humor. *Crimes exemplaires* recounts 100 crimes as told to the Mexican law courts. These miniature memoirs, these brief confessions of why people committed murder, create a most embarrassing amusement. A couple of exemplary cases should suggest the tone of this book:

> "At first I killed him in a dream, then I couldn't help myself from really doing it. It was inevitable."

> "The poor guy, he was so ugly that each time I encountered him it was like an insult. There are limits to everything."

Perhaps we can establish a literary typology of crimes: Baroque, modernist, Wittgensteinian, classical, Situationist, romantic, Surrealist, etc. But the most terrifying reason of all is one that underlies all conflict, from the most visceral to the most conceptual: as one criminal succinctly explains, "I killed him because he didn't think like me." Indeed!

Laurent Jenny's first book, *La terreur et les signes: Poétiques de rupture* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982), contained in-depth readings of Hugo and Roussel, as well as one of the most brilliant analyses of Artaud. His most recent work just appeared: *La parole singulière* (Paris: Belin, 1990). This difficult, dense, and continually rewarding book reveals in the greatest detail the infrastructure of language, and ultimately serves as a theoretical guide to reading. The point of departure is an analysis of the "figural," that elusive rupture or eruption within and beneath language, which has already been analyzed by Lyotard in terms of a libidinal economy—not so much a confrontation of signification and sensation as an analysis of that unitary lived matrix from which they both arise. Laurent Jenny's book extends this analysis by supplementing contemporary rhetorical theory with phenomenological epistemology. This effects a "fleshing out" of linguistics and rhetoric, all the while supplying a much needed rhetorical component to previous

phenomenological analyses of the figural and gestural aspects of enunciation. By revealing the source of the ineluctable singularity of poetic discourse, this work provides a valuable tool for deciphering our modernity, and our modernism.

—Allen S. Weiss

MARJORIE WELISH

House (Blown Apart) by David Shapiro. (Woodstock, New York: The Overlook Press, 1988). Short lyrics by an exceptionally gifted poet. Although *Lateness* is arguably Shapiro's best book, in *House (Blown Apart)* numerous beautiful linguistic catastrophes reveal meaning where only facades of meaning had been. In "Mr. Average Viewer," a visitation from comedian Jerry Lewis provides the occasion gone haywire and the poet copes with it as best he can. *"Contra deum,* Jerry, I cried," says Shapiro at one point in this nightmare of the existentially ridiculous—or, by virtue of the (exquisitely timed appearance of) Latin, eloquent in its losing battle with the condition of the ridiculous.

Like "Mr. Average Viewer," "Realism" starts with a cultural given. The ubiquitous Duck/Rabbit perceptual phenomenon makes itself known, only here, as in paintings by Jasper Johns quoting the optical commonplace to which this poem refers, the Duck/Rabbit is utilized to elicit questions of knowledge that lie beyond perception. By co-opting the device of Duck/Rabbit for the language of interpretation, not perception, Shapiro clears the way for imagination to triumph over fancy, and a stunning interiority to overwhelm the putatively actual. And this, as Paul de Man would say, is exactly where Wordsworth metamorphoses into Hölderlin. Throughout the modern dwelling of *House (Blown Apart)* consciousness at some tangent to nature is made manifest and very naked, unironically distressed for all its ironic urbanity.

The Collection of Lydia Winston Malbin, auctioned at Sotheby's, New York, May 16, 1990. Noted for her early brave partisanship of Futurist art, Lydia Winston Malbin gave The Metropolitan Museum of Art important pieces by Umberto Boccioni before she died in 1989. This auction (and preview) showing what remained of this patron's Futurist and broadly modernist collection of art after her publicly-spirited gifts took place, reflects a worthy indulgence in the highs and lows of Futurist painting. The most legendary, Giacomo Balla's *The Stairway of Farewells* (c. 1908) depicts an abysmal

spiral of steps on which a trio of women have stopped, turning to look up—a compelling *image* yet illustrative of the *dynamic* Balla wishes to enact. Here, animated fracture does not disturb the stable structure, as it does in the truly radical descent by Duchamp, or for that matter, in works done earlier and later, stylistically more advanced and included in Malbin's collection: Balla's Symbolist *View of the Villa Borghese* (1906), abstract, sparking, and his study for *Abstract Velocity* or *Materiality of Lights + Speed* (1913). The point being that even with some of her holdings gone, Malbin's Futurist collection represented in the auction's preview was sufficiently extensive to offer the viewer an opportunity for subtle criticality of a movement in which the ambition to be modern often exceeded the artists' achievement. (On scrutiny, all balusters depicted in *The Stairway of Farewells* were rendered with exactitude, no matter how far down the stairwell—exposing a stylistic conflict between the hallucinatory and the illusory.) There was further, I admit, anguished pleasure in noting that the auction house underestimated the monetary value of works more stylistically advanced than celebrated.

RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS

Cary Nelson, *Repression and Recovery: Modern American Poetry and the Politics of Cultural Memory, 1910–1945* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989).

A tour de force of literary history and passion, written in one gigantic nuanced essay which forces new configurations of poets on our attention, Nelson regathers and re-presents American poetry by arguing that the canonical narratives of high modernism have compelled the amnesiac erasure of multiples of capable, persuasive, poets who did "productive work" at their cultural moment and can, reanimated here, do productive work in ours. This is at once a plausible and moving book, in part because of its special attention to black poets, female poets, left poets—a canvas of diversity, Nelson's scope is gratifying: he does exacting and accurate close readings of both visual and verbal texts, is alive to historical and contextual configurations, and offers stunning theoretical meditations in the course of the book. These meditations are on such topics as: the narratives of literary history; interests, pretenses of disinterest; the multiple subject positions possible in the conduct of literary study and the reading of poetry; minor and ephemeral literatures; the canon and its constitutively dismissive

functions, so that "canon" itself becomes a notion to be eroded. Nelson proposes and deploys a new relationship between "the canon" and literary history, not mutually reinforcing, but adversarial and confrontative. He also suggests many moments when formalist innovation and radical politics go together. It is impossible even to list the many figures, known and underknown whom Nelson treats in the text and in the impressive notes: all the known American modernists (Pound, Eliot, Stevens, cummings, Williams), Afro-American poets (Claude McKay, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Sterling Brown), women writers (Mina Loy, Gertrude Stein, Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven), Abraham Lincoln Gillespie, Amy Lowell. Sherwood Anderson, Carl Sandburg, Kenneth Patchen, Muriel Rukeyser, Lola Ridge. And many more. He also considers political poetry of the '30s as a discursive formation and is especially fierce about the "process of repression and the construction of a diminished, sanitized cultural memory" (166) where left and radical poetries are concerned, and where the making of a genteel modernism eviscerated political, visual, and social effervescence. This is a gripping and energizing book, a must for *Sulfur* readers.

Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

Three essays and a coda, each working on the borderline between "theory and poetry" (42), remarkably illustrated with montages of stills from Trinh Minh-ha's films. Each of the essays is a gloss on one of the keywords of the title: Woman, Native, Other, all try to understand "writing," and other forms of cultural production. An exemplum of cultural studies, Trinh works with and questions concepts in feminist practice, anthropology, and literary criticism. Her special fascination is the way she attempts a fusion of certain post-structuralist practices (of decentering, of multiple subject positions, the attack on positivist social science; the critique of binary thinking) with certain romantic gynocritical practices (the insistence upon a special female practice of writing and perception; the notion of narrative, or storytelling, as the special invention of woman). She does so by showing how the despised woman/native/other are making an art and cultural practices sophisticated by contemporary standards (non-linear, deferred, built on difference, on interplays with silence). The "Woman" section is built on (uncited) Woolf, Russ, Olson, and works with materials from Cixous, and asks what is it to do real political art ("commitment") given the reflexive nature of writing ("the Mirror-Writing Box"). The Native section is a long and lucid attack on the "Great Masters"—Malinowski and Lévi-Strauss. It is jeopardy to forget the triple palimpsest of historical inscriptions (woman, woman of color, postcolonial person) to make writing. And thus "the to-and-fro movement between the written woman and the writing woman is an endless one," she says (30), in one of the notable epigrams or koans in

a book in which this kind of rhetoric is of real distinction. She is concerned "not with inserting a 'me' into language, but with creating an opening where the 'me' disappears while 'I' endlessly come and go." (35) The paradox of enacting the dispersals of the writer while touting the presence of the socially marked writer is resolved by a renewed commitment to the examination of the medium and materials of cultural work, reclaiming the radical practices of modernism for postcolonial feminism. The vow: "In writing close to the other of the other, I can only choose to maintain a self-reflexively critical relationship toward the material, a relationship that defines both the subject written and the writing subject, undoing the I while asking 'what do I want wanting to *know* you or me?'" (76)

The photographs, with some of the incisive epigrams as captions, make a mysterious second text. It is mysterious because Trinh Minh-ha does not discuss her films, nor how to read visual stuff, and because the stills are taken out of context. Yet they seem to punctuate the book with a reinforcing commentary of private meaning and public implication.

Michael Davidson, *The San Francisco Renaissance: Poetics and Community at Mid-century;* in the series Cambridge Studies in American Literature and Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

Lucid, nuanced, informed, this is a model literary history of the literary and social formation of interlocking "bohemias" (Rexroth circle of the 1940s, the Beats, Spicer circle, Snyderian neo-primitives, the Duncan group) as equally at ease with interpretive and theoretical debate as with the choice and framing of telling incident, example, analysis. Davidson argues that the San Francisco poetries are characterized by the romantic ideals of radical and dissenting community ("participation, immediacy, spontaneity"), by a performative ethos of equal parts of social hope and social anxiety and by the realities of exclusionary behaviors, all in the interests of a new poetry which is one of the key "players" in a countercultural movement for political, cultural and social transformation. A fine moment is Davidson's "history of the narrative" of the fabrication and packaging of beatnik; another is his feminist analysis of *"whose* Renaissance? Renaissance of *what?"* Two other main socio-political subtexts emerge and reemerge: anarchopacifism and homosexuality in a homophobic society. Davidson discusses Robert Duncan, Jack Spicer, Allen Ginsberg, and Jack Kerouac with special care, treating the reader to succinct analyses of "Howl" and the odic, Kerouac's "our gang" male bonding, Duncan's heterodox, erotic, and feminized tradition (e.g. in "Poem Beginning with a Line by Pindar"); Spicer's cultic cadre. In the course of the book, Davidson makes his elegant entries into key definitional debates: overriding Bloom's oedipal struggle in favor of the self-conscious intertextuality of (say) Duncan; setting aside von Hallberg's notion that good poetry is conformist,

not oppositional; challenging Altieri's passive-receptive "immanence" for its historical and apolitical implications. I much appreciated his frontal discussion of "Gender in Bohemia" which analyzes the "Renaissance's" misogyny, sexist representations, dis-ease with actual women artists except in helpmeet/medium positions, concluding that the "privileged narrative" of the San Francisco Renaissance excludes women, and that certain contemporary work by women (Judy Grahn's, Denise Levertov's, Diane DiPrima's) begins in order to seize critical and poetic power over these stories.

Rosmarie Waldrop, *Shorter American Memory,* (Providence, RI: Paradigm Press, 1988).

A book of short prose works, twenty-two of them, playing what we know of our history (Vanderbilt, Lincoln, wagon trails) and its tame rubrics ("The Golden Age in New England") against the comic invention of recombinings based on or derived from a 1937 work of American history. This book is a "sounding," in Houston Baker's terms, identifying the self-deceiving melodies behind pompousness, pretense, and patriotisms. It is a dead-pan experiment in making the New Sentence from various Old Sentences, and by these phrasal and semantic combinations, it takes a winsome look at the underside of our history. There is a malaprop, punning translation of the Declaration of Independence and an alphabetic prose poem which offers the ground note of the poetics here: "much measured material might modestly marry masterly movement." The social commentary invented in collage coupure, framing, and recombining is comparable to one of Hannah Höch's visual works.

Tom Mandel, *Four Strange Books* (Gaz, 1990). A sense of a spiritual quest and practice, which is deeply committed to "What things teach with their language/ [which] is different from what things teach with/our language." (30) Some solemn, but not humorless or uncritical, consideration of Oppen and Stevens, and a considerably fruitful tension with contemporary erasures of presence. The whole makes a passionate, meditative book: calm, probing, responsible to the self, making the ritualistic preparation for understanding: the whole an evocation of a state of readiness. "Seamless white, ironic order flows/in place spangled in a timeless outlook/of metamorphic folds, spatters & discernment." (112) In the work there is a perhaps reluctant, but not-uninformed continuous insistence on presence or mystery behind appearance—exactly what we have been warned off by post-structuralism. In such lines as: "Redemption stands/ behind its transverse wall of moods." But also "Teach me inner words, world where is your handle?" (p 95) And maybe also "some mean in my meaning." (114) I admire the meditative sweep—syntax, pace of disclosure, and *patience*

of quite a number of poems, but especially "The Answers" and "Square Core of Stealth in the Tracery."

Beverly Dahlen, *A Reading (11–17),* (Elmwood, CT: Potes & Poets Press, 1989).

She wrote in *Temblor* 10 about *tautology* and *redundancy,* forms of repetition, forms to which she calls deconstructive attention. Rather than being "errors fatal to the orderly progress of thought," circular thinking, forms of excess or of its droopy opposite—possibly one might base one's rhetoric here. She seems to have done so with the works in this collection, mainly a cross between prose and poetry with both lyric and phatic bursts, arrays of detritus and clichés, dreams (which are, amusingly, about the only thing allowed to be narrative), birds throughout, a walking through the world, worrying about language. As with the first *Reading* (Momo's Press), Dahlen cuts the self loose from its moorings, lashes it to the mast, and sees where the drift takes it, but this work is barer of the sense of personality, closer to "collective autobiography," or "acts of language in which there is no preferred observer," notions that seem to have impact on style and the developing poetics (8 & 9). One place she or they go: the redundant plethora of possible sentences ("there will never be time to write all the sentences one may have/ been capable of writing," 62) in comparison the tautology of death (of the writer, all writers, the reader, all readers): "deaths never made up/not finished/going on deathing." (32) This work (among other things) asks itself how to conduct a reading of itself when subjectivity will unroll in ghost and gap but never totally end: "what are/ these presences? they accumulate./ but we are gone on from there./ we cannot read this for the peaks only/ but it is difficult to give the same weight to a non-recurring/ word, substance is a piling up." (39) Entering a landscape "unilluminated by metaphysics" does one have a chance of figuring out what one is inside of? In this work, every space "seemed to be haunted ground filling up fast with the thought of thought." (101—final line).

ELIOT WEINBERGER

I was cheered by the news this morning that the head of some Boston nut-group had condemned the opening there of the Mapplethorpe show as "avant-garde, anti-Christian, anti-American, and perverse." The irony of the current NEA controversy is that these Soldiers of God may indeed effect

a Confucian rectification of names: restoring the term "avant-garde" to its former place of dignity as subverter of norms.

Day after day, defenders of the NEA piously repeat that these works are not obscene, but Art that Enriches the Human Soul. It's not true. They are, like all art, obscene: presenting, literally, an *opposite scene*, opposite to the world that is before our eyes.

We should be emphasizing that the primary function of art is subversion: the bringing to light of the sub(terranean) versions: the versions that reveal that the world is not quite what we thought it is.

There has been only one reason for the perennial suppression of art: it tells you what you don't know, and that's more than most states can stand.

It should be remembered that the NEA is a product of the Vietnam War, the moment in this century when American artists and writers were most visibly the enemies of the state. It was founded and then expanded by our two wiliest presidents, Johnson and Nixon. They sure knew what they were doing. Snip through all the rhetoric of how *my* art could never be compromised by a government grant and one fact is plain: Through the Reagan years, the century's most shameful period in American history, the artists were silent. We will need a new generation to bury this generation of good Germans.

Parallel to this was the universities' friendly takeover of student protest by introducing "relevancy" to the curriculum: teaching what the students already knew, showing their sensitivity to student expression by encouraging workshops in various forms of "creativity." This required, of course, the wholesale importation of writers and artists, and the hitherto unimaginable invention of "poet" as a comfortable middle-class career. With it came a kind of collective amnesia: no one seems to remember that, before 1970, the university was considered the enemy of contemporary poetry.

I remember giggling in the early 1980s when I saw the Norton Critical Edition of *On the Road*, alongside *The Scarlet Letter* and *Billy Budd:* it had taken less than thirty years to entomb that once-scandalous book. Today the leap from the barricades to the marble halls is nearly instantaneous. Last night's bad boy or girl of the arts this morning receives a hefty fellowship, a university chair, a museum retrospective, a shelf of critical exegesis. We're kidding ourselves if we think that this is a sign of a healthy plurality in the institutions—which can, and should, only function as monuments to the dead—or that this hasn't changed the face of the arts.

Is it more incredible that Karen Finley's NEA grant was overruled, or that someone who publicly shoves yams up her ass should dutifully fill out the endless government forms to attest to her craft? That this and the other NEA cases have been generally condemned as "censorship"—here at the end of a century that murdered and still murders thousands of artists and writers,

banned and still bans tens of thousands of works—is indicative of how cozy and drowsy the American arts have become.

Nearly everything of enduring interest produced in the last 200 years was made by the perverse, the obscene, the ostracized, the subversive. These days I find myself nearly alone in hoping that the right will succeed in making the arts perverse again. Not so long ago, the goal of artists and writers was to work in such a way that no one would dream of giving you money for it.

This morning I also happened to be reading (in Wayne Koestenbaum's *Double Talk: The Erotics of Male Literary Collaboration)* this anecdote of our pillar of rectitude T.S. Eliot:

Conrad Aiken had praised Eliot's 1925 *Poems.* Eliot replied by sending him a page ripped out of *The Midwives' Gazette* in which he had underlined a description of vaginal discharge: "blood, mucous, and shreds of mucous . . .purulent offensive discharge." Aiken at the time was in the hospital suffering from an anal fistula. In the accompanying letter, Eliot wrote: "Have you tried Kotex for it. . .KOTEX. Used with success by Blue-eyed Claude the Cabin Boy." The reference was to a poem, written by Eliot, which he enclosed. Claude was: "a clever little nipper/ who filled his ass with broken glass/ and circumcised the skipper."

The recent death of Mary Oppen sent me back to her autobiography *Meaning A Life* (Black Sparrow). Too few know it: a classic of "objectivist" prose. In her poetry Mary often sounded like George; in the prose however she reveals herself as Reznikoff's worthiest disciple. It is extraordinary how much she was able to pack into the simplest declarative sentence. Equally remarkable, at any given moment in the book the lives of Mary and George—and Mary's emotional responses—are unfolding amidst the enormous events in the world. This is not so much a modernist collage as the result of modernist collage. A 20th century sensibility: the news as autobiography.

CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

Unless Eliot Weinberger has read all the works produced on NEA grants during the Reagan period, he is not in a position to say the artists "were silent." Such a judgment would also have to take into consideration all the

art, performance, dance, etc., sponsored and not sponsored by NEA funding. I can immediately think of a dozen sponsored and non-sponsored people whose work during this period is major, political, and confrontational. I suspect that Eliot can too.

Or would he have preferred for Reagan to invade and bomb, say, Salvador, so that we could have gone out on the streets as in the (what it sounds like) good old Vietnam days?

I've given up on trying to make a connection between source of income and quality of artistic production. Capable imaginations will do their work as long as health and time permit. Is family money less poisonous than an NEA grant? A 40 hour week at minimum wage less detrimental than university teaching?

In the long run, the university writing workshop programs will have had zero effect on American writing. Each age produces warehouses of mediocre art; every age is a bad age relative to the support and appreciation of contemporary art. If "the function of art is the extension of human consciousness" (Hugh MacDiarmid, 1926), it follows that only a very tiny minority will hail the new in its own time.

I like the spirit of William O'Rourke's "Why I won't refuse an NEA grant" article in the June 25 issue of *The Nation*. Reflecting upon the obscenity restrictions, O'Rourke commented: "All my depictions of sadomasochism and homoeroticism have literary value, always have and always will."

The Nation also ran a powerful, if unjust, attack on Francis Bacon by Arthur Danto in their June 30th issue, occasioned by the Bacon retrospective at MOMA. Danto sent me back to Adam Gopnik's sympathetic and perceptive article on the painter in the February 26 issue of *The New Yorker*. Here is Gopnik's conclusion:

> It is the oddly fixed faith that there is some value in cataloguing physical life in all its exhausting and grungy needs and betrayals which lets Bacon go on painting. This emotion has nothing upbeat in it; there is no silver lining save for a stubborn and unsordid faithfulness to the integrity of its own position. Bacon reminds you in the end of Dante's steadfast Epicureans, whose tombs in the Inferno are left unguarded, because everybody knows they would never abandon their exhausted mortal bodies even if God let them.

I eagerly purchased a copy of Gerald Marzorati's book on Leon Golub (*A Painter of Darkness*, Viking), but found it disappointing. The book is of value only for Golub's conversation which is laced throughout the text. Marzorati never gets beyond his fascination with Golub, and spends much

of his time with ponderous excursions on political history. The book is permeated with simplistic generalizations like the following: "Painting had persisted. It had persisted despite everything, including the elegiac. It had not been overwhelmed and crippled by the elegiac in the way, say, that poetry had, at least in the West (You can hardly read an essay about poetry without reading of its diminished place in the culture)."

Three recent collections of poetry run the gamut of the comedic bases of life. Larry Goodell's *Firecracker Soup* (attractively produced by Cinco Puntos Press) is writing right on the edge of poetry-to-be-read and poetry-to-be-performed, a kind of Dada activism, as if Goodell has a Spike Jones band crammed inside him. Ron Padgett's *The Big Something* (The Figures) is a nice addition to Padgett's increasingly impressive body of work (which includes excellent translations; he is currently doing all of Cendrars' poetry which U of Cal Press will publish in 1991). I'd like to see a Padgett Selected which would include some of the truly wonderful and crazy poems, like "Cufflinks," "Wilson, 57," and "Radio," from earlier now out-of-print collections. Keith Waldrop is the least funny of these three poets, but I was struck by how a sense of taking himself lightly (while he writes very seriously) contributes to the character of the writing in his Selected Poems, *The Opposite of Letting the Mind Wander* (Lost Roads). A gentle irony aerates Waldrop's language as it folds back and forth upon itself, ode and elegy reflected phrase by phrase. The last poem in the collection, "Sixth Transcendental Study," is stunning.

Three engaging first books: April Bernard's *Blackbird Bye Bye* (Vintage): acidic, Spicerian shadows in her serial-pieces. Very filled-out lines that seldom relax into description. I suspect that she is a prose-writer at heart but, perhaps like D.H. Lawrence, capable of writing intelligent poetry as a "wing" of her work at large. Peter Cole's *Rift* (Station Hill) has most of its energy tied up in sound-associative, narrow, winding, fragmented stanzas that, in these respects, are very well done. Who will Cole be when and if he more fully inhabits his work? Barbara Jordan's *Channel* (Beacon) is also meticulous, if softer, writing. Its strength and weakness is the extent to which it collects, like a Joseph Cornell box, read/found bits and pieces. She appears to be building source areas to cultivate. I'm impressed by her painstaking, voiced collaging.

Seeing more and more Charles Olson material, I have the feeling Olson is less and less attended to. If this is true, what a shame, especially for writing students who could save themselves years of pawing each other by reading any 200 pages of Olson. The problem with entering Olson is that the party is going on at such full-tilt that Mr. Olson himself cannot be found and asked for a few statements as to what this party is about. Given the difficulty of gaining a threshold focus on a poet who may turn out to be

the most imposing figure after Dickinson, I heartily recommend Paul Christensen's edition of *In Love In Sorrow: The Complete Correspondence of Charles Olson and Edward Dahlberg* (Paragon House). In 200 pages, we have a discreet chapter of Olson's life, and a ruthless realization of the perils in all mentor/apprentice relationships. We also now have the 9th Volume of the Olson/ Creeley *Complete Correspondence* (Black Sparrow—and how much Olson and Creeley readers are beholden to John Martin for not flagging on his commitment to the publication of probably the most elaborate correspondence between two major figures in American literature). In roughly 2000 pages, we have moved from April 1950 to April 1952—2 years! The editing, after George Butterick's death, has been capably taken over by Richard Blevins. In what appears to be George's last piece of writing (done after his extraordinary essay on "The Kingfishers," which appeared in the winter 1989 issue of *American Poetry),* which opens Volume 9, Butterick writes: "the potential of each letter is for stirring an equal response, a co-response. These men are corresponsive, corresponsible correspondents."

Lastly, a bolt from the blue: Camille Paglia's *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (Yale). Ms. Paglia imagines an electric opposition between nature and art, with sexuality as the short-circuiting between. She proposes that Judeo-Christianity has never defeated paganism, which as image and personality ranges from the Venus of Willendorf to 20th century pop culture. While much of Paglia's literary-influence proposals and her sense of world literary center (roughly, Spencer through Wilde) seem to have sprung full-blown from the head of Harold Bloom, her pagan focus allows her a much wider range (art, psychology, religion) than literature alone. Imagine long paragraphs, often as intricate and complex as Edward Dahlberg's, in which the highly visual language is a potlatch of the popular and the erudite. Paglia is turned on by all sorts of things (vampires, gore, gangbangs, fascism) that most scholars would not admit to, or even share with their analysts, and she boldly, joyfully, challenges the reader to spar with her ideas, some of which strike me as brilliant, some half-baked (she loads the violence and horror of nature onto woman, and lets men off the hook). She is best on that art she defines as "decadent" (Coleridge, Sade, Baudelaire, Beardsley, Wilde, Dickinson), and when she cannot manage to swallow a figure (her pages on Wilde and Dickinson are thrilling—Blake for the most part eludes her), she still has compelling things to say about individual works. Relative to the bland, cerebral language that characterizes most criticism, Paglia is an apocalypse, and while she steps on many toes, my hunch is the book will be either politely dismissed or ignored. I urge you to read the book, and if you feel like it, shout at it while you are reading it. *Sexual Personae* made me realize again just how few books are crystal balls of stormy light. I salute Camille Paglia's witty and insolent courage.

CONTRIBUTORS

MILTON KESSLER's *The Grand Concourse* has recently been published by MSS (Binghamton); he was co-editor of *Choice*. RACHEL TZVIA BACK has published poetry in *Tyuonyi;* she lives in Israel. KEITH TUMA is working on a book on Basil Bunting. ELIOT WEINBERGER's thoughts on America are soon to be syndicated in 180 Mexican newspapers. ALLEN S. WEISS has recently completed a manuscript on Antonin Artaud and is co-curating an exhibition of outsider art at Parson's in NYC this November. DAVID SHAPIRO's most recent book, *House (Blown Apart),* is noticed in this issue by Marjorie Welish. PAUL CHRISTENSEN's edition of the Olson/Dahlberg Correspondence *(In Love, In Sorrow)* has recently been published by Paragon House; his *Minding the Underworld: Clayton Eshleman and Late Postmodernism* will be published this winter by Black Sparrow Press. JEAN-PAUL AUXEMERY, who lives in Echillais, is the major French translator of Charles Olson; he recently visited Dogtown with Gerrit Lansing. DOMINIQUE FOURCADE's titles published by P.O.L. (Paris) include *Xbo* (1988), *Son blanc du un* (1986), *Rose-déclic* (1984), and *Le Ciel pas d'angle* (1983). Ulysse-Fin-de-Siècle (Dijon) has recently published RICHARD SIEBURTH's translation of Michael Palmer's *Sun*. KEITH WALDROP's *The Opposite of Letting the Mind Wander* is noticed in this issue. RODERICK IVERSON's most recent book is *Joan of Arc & Rip van Winkle* (Deep Forest Press, 1987). KAREN MAROGLIS, originally from English South Africa, is married to Bert Papenfuss-Gorek and lives in East Berlin. MITCH COHEN, an American who has been living in Berlin since 1976, edited and translated the 1983 anthology *BERIIN, contemporary writing from East and West Berlin* (Bandanna Books). MARJORIE WELISH's *The Windows Flew Open* will be published by Burning Deck in 1991. ALISON BUNDY's stories are from a manuscript-in-process titled *Dunce Cap*. Forthcoming, from JACKSON MAC LOW, are *Pieces o' Six* and *Barnesbook* (Sun & Moon), and *Merzgedichte* in Memoriam *Kurt Schwitters* (Station Hill). CHARLES NORTH's most recent collection is *The Year of the Olive Oil* (Hanging Loose Press). THOMAS VOGLER is Professor of Literature at the University of California, Santa Cruz. SPENCER SELBY lives in San Francisco. CYNTHIA NADELMAN, a contributing editor of *ARTnews,* lives in NYC; her poetry has appeared in *The Paris Review* and *Pequod*. APRIL BERNARD's first collection of poems (noticed in this issue) won the 1988 Walt Whitman Award from the Academy of American Poets; her first novel, *Pirate Jenny,* was published in June, 1990, by W.W. Norton. CHARLES BERNSTEIN has recently published *The Absent Father in Dumbo* (Zasterle Press, Canary Islands) and edited *The Politics of Poetic Forms: Poetry and Public Policy* (Roof Books). RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS has edited *The Selected Letters of George Oppen* (Duke University Press, 1990); her *The Pink Guitar: Writing as Feminist Practice,* will be published by Routledge this year. A chapbook, *Draft X: Letters* is also expected from Singing Horse Press this year.

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